

かびおね!

—まっぴろげな神々と神頼しの魔王—

IV



The Illustrious Sage, True Lord Erlang

Part 1

"Great misfortune huh..."

Looking at the strip of fortune telling paper he had drawn on a whim, Godou muttered.

Since he was not a superstitious person who believed in fortune telling, Godou's only response was to smile wryly.

This happened on his way home from school, when he visited the Nezu Shrine by chance.

"Oh dear. Something interesting is written here."

Erica commented beside him as she looked at the fortune in his hand.

In contrast, Erica, who had also come along for her fortune, had drawn the impeccable outcome of "great fortune."

"The one who keeps watch, the nemesis is coming. Matters of conflict, evasion would be good fortune. —Isn't this predicting a desperate situation in the next battle?"

"That so?"

Godou replied nonchalantly and shrugged.

"I believe that avoiding conflict with any kind of god would be considered good fortune. That's definitely correct."

Less than half a month had passed since the battle against the heretic god with the monkey appearance in the land of Nikkou—on the plains of Senjougahara.

The invincible war god with vast divine powers and carrying the attribute of steel. In terms of pure combat power, he was the most powerful opponent Godou had ever fought to date.

However, Godou had also faced off against deities on the likes of the ancient Middle Eastern divine king as well as the goddess of wisdom who concealed a true serpentine nature.

Oh well, they were pretty much all the same in the fact that every single battle was very difficult.

In other words, a seven-hundred-story building looked pretty much the same as a seven-hundred-and-fifty-story building when viewed from the ground. Something like that.

In response to Godou's sloppy perspective—Erica simply went "You're not incorrect" but supplemented:

"However, I am very interested in the one described as Godou's 'nemesis.' Although your nemeses seem to number many, in actual fact, that's not always the case."

"Well, after all, most heretic gods simply do as they please, so their crimes eventually catch up to them."

Realizing what Erica was getting at, Godou answered.

As a Campione, the authority Kusanagi Godou wielded consisted of Verethragna's transformations, the [Ten Incarnations]. Each incarnation had its own stringent usage conditions, such as requiring the target to be a great sinner who had caused the people to suffer, etc.

Moreover, in general, most [Heretic Gods] committed atrocities repeatedly without being self-conscious of them.

Furthermore, Godou's source of power, Verethragna the guardian god of justice, could be described as the nemesis of such evil.

In terms of compatibility, one could conversely describe Godou as the nemesis of heretic gods instead.

In particular, both the white stallion that destroyed the people's enemy with scorching flames as well as the warrior who wielded the sword of light for tearing apart evil gods could be considered powerful trump cards against the majority of gods.

But Godou realized at this moment that the other girl in his company looked like she wanted to say something.

Namely, the girl who had drawn "middle fortune."

"What's the matter, Mariya?"

"No, nothing much, just something slightly concerning..."

The prim and proper Yamato Nadeshiko answered vaguely as if feeling rather troubled.

However, Godou encouraged her to speak, casting a glance that said "Go on and tell me." Yuri timidly spoke up:

"After listening to your exchange just now, I keep getting an uneasy feeling. I wonder if Godou-san might in the near future encounter an opponent with rather unfavorable natural advantages—an existence akin to a nemesis..."

The Hime-Miko Mariya Yuri possessed the power of [Spirit Vision].

Compared to drawing great misfortune, the fact that Yuri felt something "concerning" meant far more to Godou. Falling into silence, Godou exchanged glances with Erica beside him.

Was yet another troublesome battle coming in the near future...?

In hindsight, this was perhaps the incident's starting point.

The next day after the fortune drawing—

Godou and Yuri were heading to the Arakawa ward together after school.

They were both in uniform because they headed straight from school. This was not some personal matter. Otherwise, the blonde and silver-haired girls would probably have followed along.

However, those two girls had matters they had to attend to separately today.

The girl who had appointed herself as Godou's grand chamberlain was set to meet up with them slightly later. But before that, Godou and Yuri were alone together. Godou could not help but feel quite shy. After switching to the train, they reached the station closest to the destination and finished the journey on foot.

Although Godou did not ask, he felt that Yuri must surely be feeling the same way.

Walking side by side, they exchanged few words, most probably affected by the mood. Both Godou and Yuri were unaccustomed to the opposite sex. This was obvious from the current atmosphere.

However...

Very incredibly, Godou did not feel uncomfortable in spite of that.

Walking shoulder to shoulder, the distance between Godou and Yuri was slightly too intimate if they were merely fellow students from the same school.

Separated by only centimeters, all Godou had to do was reach out slightly if he wanted to touch Yuri's hand.

"I-If little children were in this situation, perhaps they would hold hands..."

Yuri suddenly whispered softly, bowing her head shyly.

Were Erica in her place, she would probably have taken Godou's hand directly as she spoke.

However, the Yamato Nadeshiko beside him was probably not going to do something like that. Instead, she smiled with a shy expression on her face. Godou smiled gently in response.

This was enough. Somehow, he always felt a sense of mutual connection in their thoughts and feelings.

Ever since the commotion at Nikkou city, this feeling persisted between Godou and Yuri.

Despite talking little, there was a sense of solace as they walked casually together, their destination entering into view.

This was a certain shrine not far from the Sumida River.

There were a few dozen people gathered on the visiting road beyond the entrance torii.

It happened to be the day of a temple fair, hence the many stalls present.

One could find the usual stalls selling takoyaki, roasted sausage, fried pancakes with assorted vegetables, cotton candy, chocolate bananas etc.

"This sight makes me a little nostalgic. I feel like buying something to eat."

"Is that so? In that case, let us go check it out later."

Yuri suggested in response to Godou's unintentional mutterings.

Godou immediately nodded to concur. But compared to a temple fair, they had more pressing matters to deal with first. Yuri proceeded to walk in front, leading Godou to their destination.

The pair left the lively and bustling visiting road and passed through the protective forest.

Entering the confines of the shrine, Godou could not find any signs of the priests and shrine maidens who were supposed to be present. Perhaps they were busy with various tasks and managing the temple fair.

However, there was probably an additional reason why the shrine personnel could not be found.

Namely, they voluntarily stayed away, knowing that the Devil King Campione was visiting on this day—

"I've been waiting for you, Onii-sama!"

Coming out from within the shrine to greet them was a young girl dressed in a miko outfit.

Mariya Hikari. Despite being a sixth grader, she was an apprentice Hime-Miko who possessed the special power of [Disaster Purification]. In addition, she was Yuri's younger sister.

"All the preparations are ready. Please come this way."

Hikari was a precocious girl, wise beyond her years.

Smiling cheerfully, she displayed affection as she nimbly led Godou and Yuri towards the worship hall. Godou nodded and followed behind her together with Yuri.

The interior of the worship hall was quite vast but rather dimly lit. Naturally, it was of wooden construction.

Furthermore, there were a few strange objects here—rather, there were dozens of them lined up.

White statues bearing human form.

Upon careful examination, these solid shapes were made of salt.

All were male with ages ranging from twenties to forties. The expressions on the salt statues' faces displayed surprise or fear. Most of them were dressed in suits.

For an instant, they felt like living humans. Such was the realism exhibited by the exquisite detail of these salt statues.

"These people, could they all be members of the History Compilation Committee...?"

"Yes. They were the ones who were transformed into statues of salt by the Marquis' authority when Marquis Voban came to Japan back in June..."

Yuri answered Godou's question.

The most ancient Campione, the Marquis—Dejanstahl Voban had visited Japan for the purpose of obtaining Mariya Yuri's rare and exceptional spirit vision.

After Godou fought him to a "draw," the Marquis had returned to Europe—

These salt statues before Godou's eyes were his parting gifts.

Pierced by the demonic gaze of Marquis Voban's glowing eyes of emerald, everyone was transformed into salt.

This was the authority that the elderly Campione had usurped from a certain demonic deity.

"The Eyes of Sodom... That was what the Witenagemot named this authority."

The History Compilation Committee's Amakasu Tuma had explained this yesterday.

"According to reports, all it took was one glare to turn living humans entirely into salt... Furthermore, if the Marquis felt like it, he was capable of turning thousands or even tens of thousands of people into salt instantly. All the people who witnessed the city of Sodom's destruction by God's flames were transformed into pillars of salt—This authority was named in reference to its simple ability to recreate the story recorded in the Old Testament of the Bible."

Amakasu normally displayed a inexplicably delighted expression whenever he said anything profound of this sort.

However, he was speaking with a helpless tone of voice when he delivered the explanation yesterday.

Furthermore, he was the one who made the request to Godou, asking him to attempt neutralizing the effects of the demonic gaze.

"I seem to recall it being said that it was a power usurped from the deity Balor?"

"Is that it...? Somehow, that is not the feeling I get..."

Godou muttered as he looked at the salt statues standing haphazardly before him while Yuri whispered cautiously.

"Could it be, you saw something?"

"Y-Yes. One-eyed... Body clad in armor. I think it should be ancient—a divinity from European lands. A one-eyed war god...?"

Yuri stared behind the salt statues.

The miko with exceptional spirit vision should be able to discern the appearance of the deity who supplied the authority that had been applied to the salt statues. Speaking of which, Godou recalled something in particular.

Marquis Voban was synonymous to the authority of "wolves."

This was a power that appeared to stem from one of the monstrous wolves of Norse mythology, but in actual fact, it was an ability usurped from the Greek god of the sun, Apollo.

"That old gramps was already a Campione before the Witenagemot's founding, so the information back then might not necessarily be accurate..."

On the other hand, Yuri's vision powers, which were capable of catching partial glimpses of the truth despite a total lack of clues, should be praised greatly instead.

If that was the case, perhaps Yuri might be able to discern more important information?

As Godou cast an inquiring gaze at her, Yuri shook her head apologetically.

"That is all I can currently see. The sacred name of the god who created this authority still eludes..."

"I guess Verethragna's [Sword] can't be used after all."

"However, I can indeed see that the curse placed by the Marquis has weakened compared to before. In that case, perhaps the method Amakasu-san suggested might succeed in lifting it."

Godou nodded at Yuri's comment.

Did the effects of Campiones' authorities weaken with the passage of time?

With this question in his mind, Godou decided to test things out.

During the period after the battle against Voban, Godou had obtained a new power despite the fact it was not his intention.

"Hikari, after we absorb the power as much as possible, the rest is up to you."

"Yes. Leave it to me, Onii-sama!"

Mariya Hikari agreed cheerfully.

The spirit power she wielded, disaster purification, was the special ability to neutralize all magical power and wizardry. Even the authorities of gods or Campiones could be nullified in part.

Naturally, it did not have the power to erase Marquis Voban's authority.

But if they did it this way...

If this curse of salt which had weakened for some unknown reason was further drained by Godou, then—

"Ama no Murakumo, please."

Godou spoke softly to his right arm, where the divine blade Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi resided.

This was the "partner" he had obtained after the commotion in the Netherworld. After surviving the battle at Nikkou, Godou had come to a basic understanding of how to use it.

This divine sword, with its long history, possessed the trait of magical power absorption.

Using this divine sword to absorb the magical power applied by the Marquis' authority, the curse of salt transformation could very well be weakened substantially.

Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi suddenly manifested in Godou's hand.

It took on a form that could just barely be considered a Japanese sword. The gently curved blade was quite similar to that of a katana, but was in actual fact the recreation of an ancient Japanese blade called the Warabite-tou.^[1]

In addition, Ama no Murakumo's blade was an ominous jet-black color—

Godou casually made a thrust with the dangerous-looking "partner" known as the divine sword.

"Let me absorb the power remaining from that old gramps!"

"Efficacious signs of the bearer of Fortune, I implore your manifestation!"

As Godou gave orders as he wielded the divine sword, Hikari also chanted spell words to use her spirit powers.

There was a reason why the people who were turned into salt statues had been transported to this particular shrine. Reportedly, this place worshiped as its main deity Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi's guardian—Haya Susanoo no Mikoto.

Apparently, going to suitable lands was necessary to increase the divine power of Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi.

It was mentioned earlier that members of the History Compilation Committee had gathered at this place to perform wizardry rituals. As the divine sword's blade released its power, Hikari also applied her spirit powers.

In the next instant, Yuri's eyes widened with surprise.

Although the current time was before five in the afternoon, the sky had already begun to darken.

Having completed their task, Godou and Yuri were walking along the shrine's visiting road.

People were gathered around the fair stalls in bustling crowds.

Wandering aimlessly among them, Yuri turned towards Godou with a gentle smile on her face.

"It went quite smoothly for now. Quite a relief."

"Oh well, hopefully there won't be any lingering side effects in the future."

Combining Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi and Hikari's spirit powers, the intended result was achieved.

After receiving a phone call from Amakasu who was currently absent due to handling other tasks, they were informed that he was coming to settle remaining matters once he became free later.

Before he arrived, Godou and the girls decided to tour the shrine festival first.

Hikari went off to change from her miko outfit to casual clothing, thus leaving Godou and Yuri alone together.

"I'll simply go buy some food from the stalls to take care of dinner. I think grandpa and Shizuka both said they were coming home late tonight."

"Shizuka-san? But there are no activities at the tea ceremony club today."

"She said she had some kind of promise to fulfill."

Godou and Yuri conversed as they strolled through the festival at a leisurely pace.

Whenever their gazes met, Yuri smiled calmly.

Without saying much, they simply enjoyed each other's company with a sense of inexplicable delight. Surely Yuri was feeling the same thing. Speaking of which, since they had come directly from school, both of them were still in uniform.

Taking a detour on the road home from school to spend time peacefully with pleasant company.

This was precisely the lifestyle of ordinary—or rather, normal students. Just as Godou was struck by this realization that a high school student was not supposed to experience...

Yuri tugged at the sleeve of his uniform.

"G-Godou-san. Over there is..."

"What's up, Mariya... Uh, why on earth would she be here?"

Godou shifted his gaze in the direction indicated by Yuri.

A fried noodles stall.

The girl tending to the stall was standing before a massive iron griddle, a spatula in each hand, boldly and vigorously stir-frying a great amount of Chinese noodles, bok choy, pork and other ingredients.

Dressed in a yukata, she resembled a delivery girl with great sense of presence. She was someone whom Godou knew very well.

"Shizuka, what are you doing here?"

"Ooh—? Onii-chan and Mariya-senpai!?"

The little sister looked up with an expression of surprise. This was a chance encounter at an unexpected location.

"I am helping out because of old man Asakusa's request."



Shizuka explained as she stir-fried noisily.

Her bold and vigorous stir fry technique, which contrasted greatly with her slender feminine physique, was taught by the aforementioned old man who lived at Asakusa—an elderly man who could be described as the Kusanagi siblings' distant relative, now already deceased.

Unlike grandfather Kusanagi's Casanova ways, old man Asakusa was an upstanding son of Edo.^[2]

Although he lived a life of solitude and never married, his commercial business "Ichiya" was inherited by someone who stayed in touch with the Kusanagi family.

"Come to think of it, these stalls are also run by the Tekiya guilds."^[3]

"Tekiya... What kind of business is that? I have never heard of it."

Naturally, while the siblings chatted about their relative, the one who inquired was the sheltered highborn lady unfamiliar with worldly matters.

Before Godou could answer Yuri's question, the younger sister swiftly motioned with her eyes. Do not explain in too much detail—That was what her gaze seemed to be saying.

"...Anyway, it's the job of setting up stalls at various festivals and fairs."

"...They even go to the beach during summer and ski locations in winter."

"Well, it sounds like an interesting job."

Yuri displayed a pure and innocent smile in response to the siblings who evaded the topic of a certain unnamed profession and business that "was barely considered a legitimate business nowadays."

As a side note, the old man mentioned by Shizuka was a celebrity who had opened a new era as a gambler in his youth, with a Kurikara dragon tattoo on his back. Even VIPs from the "industry" attended his funeral.

"If you told me beforehand, I could have helped out as well."

"Considering how busy you've been lately, Onii-chan, the phone call was only made to me. Oh well, after all, you'd simply reject the request anyway."

Shizuka's adorable face cast a severe glare at Godou.

Feeling her disapproving accusation, Godou replied with displeasure.

"Don't go throwing random accusations. Even for me, if an acquaintance made a request..."

"Onii-chan, are you having a date with Mariya-senpai today?"

"D-Date!?"

Shizuka's observation caused Godou to jump in fright.

"Idiot. How could you say something like that?"

"Look who's talking. Let me ask you, what else could it be?"

Glaring severely, Shizuka spoke.

"Without even going home first, you came here directly after school. Just the two of you. The situation is plain as day."

" "....." "



Godou fell into helpless silence. Yuri also gulped.

Only when Shizuka pointed it out to them did they realize that the current situation was rather difficult to explain clearly.

It was not as if they could honestly say they came to the shrine here to clean up a mess left behind by the old monster from eastern Europe, right? But were Godou to attempt deception, he would be in trouble once he got home later.

Just as he was about to give up, Godou remembered.

The oracle Yuri had received a few days ago. About meeting a nemesis in the near future or something like that. Could it be referring to Shizuka?

But for one's own little sister to be the nemesis seemed a bit much... Just as Godou muttered such words to himself—

Yuri suddenly spoke up beside him.

"E-Excuse me... Godou-san, Shizuka-san, a so-called date refers to the act of a male and a female going out together to enjoy a delightful time together... Is that correct?"

Yuri sought confirmation in a greatly flustered manner.

For such a basic question to be asked when things had already come to this, not only Godou but also Shizuka were stunned. The two siblings nodded emphatically at the same time.

Then Yuri suddenly said the following with a surprised expression:

"What should I do... I, today is my first date..."

"Eh!?"

"B-Because it was just Godou-san and me, the two of us, like this, together all this time—"

Wrong, totally wrong! Didn't we agree that your little sister Hikari was coming along slightly later?

Feeling compelled to voice these words, Godou was just about to speak. However, when he noticed Yuri's inexplicably happy expression despite her flustered state, he could not bring himself to deliver the words for some reason.

"A-As I thought, this could be considered our first time experience, right..."

"W-Well, perhaps so... Maybe."

"I-I think so too."

"R-Really?"

"S-Should be?"

As her slightly moistened eyes pleaded, even Godou found himself reacting in unexpected ways.

Instantly, he nodded. I suppose one could view it that way. Thinking that to himself, Godou had a subtle feeling. But very quickly, he would forget all about such matters.

Because he saw Yuri smiling with happy satisfaction, which naturally caused the corner's of Godou's lips to move in turn. The end result consisted of Godou and Yuri smiling as they exchanged gazes right in front of Shizuka.

"Guh...! I can't believe you're completely ignoring the fact that your younger sister is watching!? Even grandpa hasn't reached this level yet!"

Shizuka began to get angry on her own, greatly increasing the forcefulness of her noodle stir-frying motions.

In terms of colorful and abundant female relationships, the grandfather was unparalleled in his Casanova ways.

Godou frowned in response to Shizuka's use of this problematic character to prove her point.

"Grandpa simply avoids letting his family witness the behavior he's ashamed of. As for Mariya and me, we're just good friends. There's nothing to feel guilty about."

"Ah yes, there is nothing about the relationship between Godou-san and I that does not hold up to public scrutiny."

Godou asserted and Yuri immediately concurred.

Ever since the Nikkou commotion, Godou and Yuri as well as Liliana started attaining a sort of secure state of mind in this area of mutual agreement. Was it because the cohesion of shared destinies had intensified, or they had simply started to accept things...

"A-Although lately I've been getting the feeling you're advancing rapidly along a shameless rascal's path, Onii-chan, I never expected even Mariya-senpai to get involved, given her inexperience in worldly matters! Onii-chan, this sort of growth and development is a bit excessive—"

"Instead of talking about this, aren't the fried noodles ready?"

"Oh no."

Reminded by her older brother, Shizuka immediately calmed her wrath. Holding spatulas in both hands with great familiarity, she packaged the large amount of noodles into separate plastic containers.

Not being picky eaters could be said to be the virtue shared by the Kusanagi siblings.

No matter the quantity of food filling the dining table or how unpalatable cuisine they faced, not only the brother but also the sister possessed the special skill of eating everything without wasting anything.

"Stop acting all lovey-dovey before me, okay. Onii-chan, regarding your indiscretions in female relationships, there are countless examples I could point out to show your need for restraint. Anyway, leaving the topic for now, would you like to eat some of this?"

With a seemingly generous tone of voice, Shizuka gestured towards a packed serving of fried noodles.

"Oh, please rest assured, Mariya-senpai. Despite the small size of this type of stall, all the ingredients bought are very clean. Also, I use water that I brought here myself by bucket rather than dirty pipe water. Hence, there are absolutely no hygiene issues."

Indeed, the junk food sold at stalls did seem quite ill-suited for the high-class lady. Despite Shizuka's domineering personality, she was actually quite considerate of others.

She must have been making use of the labor provided by "old man Asakusa's young employees" who were originally stationed at this stall. Seeing none of them around, Godou presumed Shizuka had ordered them to go buy something or other.

As she listened to Shizuka's words, Yuri's eyes began to shine—

Godou suddenly felt his body suddenly shake and fill up entirely with power.

This was his body's preparation for an imminent battle.

Because he sensed a deity nearby who must be defeated, as a god-slayer—a Campione, his body and mind had entered a combat state.

"...Sorry, but Mariya and I still have things to do. We'll come over again later."

Godou immediately looked at Yuri. Possessing spirit senses more keen than anyone else's, the Hime-Miko also sensed the divine presence and nodded instantly in return.

"Excuse us, Shizuka-san. We shall be back shortly."

"Oh okay. Oh by the way, Onii-chan, don't you go bringing Mariya-senpai over to anywhere strange, okay!"

Godou left the stall together with Yuri who was bidding his sister goodbye seriously.

Listening to the reprimands coming from behind them, they gradually left the visiting road where the temple fair was being held and entered the protective forest.

Despite having no idea what was going to happen, Godou decided it would be best to go somewhere with fewer people around.

Godou and Yuri ran rapidly through the silence of the mixed forest.

They decided to head towards the shrine interior for now. There should not be any people in this direction apart from Hikari and the History Compilation Committee members. Just at this moment, Yuri yelled loudly.

"Godou-san, look over there!"

Godou turned his gaze towards where Yuri was looking—a dark area deep in the mixed forest.

Amidst the darkness, Godou discovered a pair of refined and distinguished eyes. Just eyes only. Nothing else could be seen. No figure. Only two eyeballs floating in the air.

Moreover, the moment Godou sensed a divine presence from this pair of eyes—

A third eye opened. Above the pair of distinguished looking eyes, at the position corresponding to the forehead of a human face, a third eyeball appeared as a vertical slit opened.

At the same time, Godou was greatly stunned.

The massive expanding magical power always ready in a Campione's body—That magical power was suddenly reduced by 20%.

Godou instinctively felt that the third eye had taken the power. Taking away from the Campione's body the magical power that acted as the source of his authorities—What sort of deity had manifested with this kind of trait?

Just as Godou began to ponder the situation in preparation for the coming battle—

"O Bow of Jonathan, the warrior's weapon swift as an eagle and strong as a lion—!"

The spell words of David resounded all around.

An arrow of blue light flew from behind Godou and Yuri, aiming at the third eye that just opened. With astoundingly splendid archery, this eye was pierced right through.

"Are you okay, Kusanagi Godou!?"

The archer sprinted forth, accompanied by this stern voice. Without needing to glance at her face, Godou knew she was the silver-haired knight who had agreed to converge later—Liliana Kranjcar had finally arrived.

Godou nodded greatly in response to the appearance of this reliable comrade.

He then turned his attention to the enemy with the mysterious "eye." The three-eyed god who appeared in the depths of darkness had already left without a trace.

"What on earth was that thing just now..."

"Illustrious Sage—True Lord Erlang..."

As Godou's muttering escaped from his lips, Yuri responded in a tiny voice. Instantly, Godou turned to look at the Hime-Miko who was displaying a frightened expression on her beautiful face. Was it because she saw something?

True Lord Erlang.

This was the instant when Godou first heard this curious name.

—To be continued...

Translator's Notes and References

1. [Jump up↑](#) **Warabite-tou**(刀 薙 切): a sword used by the Ainu people which influenced the development of the katana.
2. [Jump up↑](#) **Son of Edo**: Edo was the former name for Tokyo which rose to prominence as the stronghold of the Tokugawa shogunate. Renamed Tokyo after the imperial family regained power and moved there, it became the new capital of Japan. In short, "son of Edo" refers to a native Japanese man born and raised in Tokyo.
3. [Jump up↑](#) **Tekiya**(手 形): itinerant Japanese merchants who, together with gamblers, were the predecessors to modern yakuza. ^[1]



Campione

I demoni delle calamità e il re dei maghi

CV

The Illustrious Sage, True Lord Erlang

Part 2

Within the territory of a certain shrine, Kusanagi Godou encountered the unidentified [Three Eyes].

Ten-odd minutes after that, Amakasu Touma arrived in a hurry. His true identity was actually a History Compilation Committee special agent descended from ninja(!) ancestors.

"Huh? Illustrious Sage, True Lord Erlang... So that's what Yuri-san said."

Amakasu frowned after he found out the name whispered by the Hime-Miko who had received a spirit vision.

Furthermore, the person in question who had spoken the oracle was not currently present. Due to the younger sister Hikari's massive exhaustion from using disaster purification so fully, her elder sister Yuri had taken her home.

"Amakasu Touma, I seem to recall that name as belonging to the Chinese pantheon..."

Liliana, who had arrived just earlier, inquired.

Even though her knowledge and experiences were quite extensive, Liliana originated from Europe after all. Consequently, she was not very well-versed in Chinese myths.

"You are correct, Liliana-san. He is a Daoist deity in charge of regulating floods, although his reputation for monster extermination is probably more famous. As implied by the two kanji characters in the 'Illustrious Sage' title."

Amakasu wrote down the two kanji in a notebook.

Illustrious Sage.[1] The one who illustrates—makes evident the sacred to manifest in the world...

"He is particularly renowned for the story where he subdued and captured Sun Wukong who was rampaging in both the celestial and terrestrial realms."

Godou recalled the name he had heard roughly half a month earlier.

—Family name Sun, given name Wukong. The self-proclaimed Great Sage Equaling Heaven. Descending upon the land of Nikkou once more, the war god in monkey form had announced thus.

"Could it be possible that the recent Great Sage Equaling Heaven is related to this incident?"

Liliana offered her opinion in her stern knightly tone of voice.

In her personal life, the silver-haired girl was presumptuously prone to blunders and easily shaken psychologically. But in combat and emergency situations, she was able to exercise 200% caution and composure.

"Correct again... As you already know, the deity stationed at Nikkou Tousei for the goal of protecting Japan from the threats of dragon and snake gods is precisely the magnificent Chinese hero, the Great Sage Equaling Heaven."

Amakasu exhaled as he explained.

"To this end, the Old One and other elders in the Netherworld put into place the [Keeper of the Horses] wizardry spell for sealing the Great Sage. In actual fact, the spell's core component has ties to the deity—the Illustrious Sage, True Lord Erlang—and is a sacred talisman carrying evil-slaying powers."

"The Old One... In other words, the deity named Susanoo who watches over Seishuu Ena."

"Indeed. Since the Great Sage no longer exists, the talisman has lost its purpose. We of the Committee will undertake its retrieval. However, because it is a rare and precious evil-slaying talisman, we decided to test it out to see if it was able to resolve a certain unresolved case."

"You mean the matter of nullifying Marquis Voban's authority?"

In response to Liliana's statement of surprise, Amakasu shrugged and smiled wryly.

"Oh dear, because I happened by chance to recall there were two elite masters among those involved in the incident, so for the sake of saving lives, a risk was taken."

"Don't go asking me to suddenly take on these kinds of risks! Come on, that's so wrong I don't even know where to begin!"

"So where exactly is this problematic talisman currently?"

"Even though they were confident things were under control, I cannot believe the History Compilation Committee's core leadership allowed such a completely irresponsible experiment to proceed."

Liliana protested, her anger surfacing slightly

A car from the Committee had just taken Godou and her to the vicinity of the Minato ward. Currently, the two were making their way to the new destination on foot.

"Thanks to them, Kusanagi Godou, you were attacked by that strange thing..."

"It's not really that big a deal. After all, the people who were turned into salt statues were saved."

Appropriately expressing his naturally generous character, Godou replied with sincerity.

However, Liliana had a serious personality and she seemed to be objecting.

"Of course there is nothing with saying that, but I always get the same feeling from Sayanomiya Kaoru as I do from Erica."

Sayanomiya Kaoru. This was the full name of the person they were going to pay a visit.

Although she was still studying in high school, she was already in charge of the History Compilation Committee's operations in the entire Kantou region.

"You say she's the same as Erica?"

"Yes. Unscrupulous in choosing means to attain goals—uh, scratch that, unscrupulous in choosing goals to enable their preferred means to be undertaken. That is the similarity I am talking about."

"...I see."

Erica and Kaoru both belong to the scheming intellectual type.

Moreover, neither of them were calm and dispassionate Machiavellians. So long as circumstances permitted them to do so, they were strange characters who infused vainglory and fantasy into their work, choosing to attain goals in the most amusing manner available.

As Godou and Liliana chatted, they soon reached the destination.

Just outside a school's main gates, many girls could be seen exiting the school.

They were dressed in black uniforms. Although the uniforms looked tacky and unfashionable on first glance, closer examination revealed a rather refined and distinctive design.

A prestigious all-girls school that prided itself on being one of Tokyo's top schools in academics and tradition.

"Kaoru-san is actually a high school student too."

And even a high school girl too. Godou muttered to himself with heartfelt feeling.

She was not only a member of the Committee's core leadership but also a high-ranking and accomplished Hime-Miko. However, in a certain way, her position was diametrically opposed to that of a "high school girl."

When Godou called her just now to see if they could meet as soon as possible, he received the following response:

"We are currently busy with preparations for the cultural festival. I won't be free until a little later."

Feeling a great dissonance in hearing words like school or cultural festival coming from her, Godou approached the school gates to pick her up.

Taking a spot close to the school gates, he began to wait for Kaoru.

Perhaps he would have found it difficult to remain unflustered to stand before an all-girls school by himself as a man. But today, Liliana was also present—

"What's the matter?"

Seeing the silver-haired girl bearing an anxious expression, Godou inquired.

They were both wearing the uniform of their school, Jounan Academy. Due to various reasons, Liliana was also quite conspicuous in appearance. As the girls leaving school successively stared at her, Godou could not believe how unsettled she became.

With a depressed expression, Liliana explained quietly.

"I have unpleasant memories in regards to closed environments like 'all-girls schools.'"

"Did something unpleasant happen in the past?"

"Yes. A few years ago, Erica and I were both stuck in an awkward situation where we needed to infiltrate an all-girls boarding school. All kinds of things happened at the time..."

"Speaking of boarding school, did you get bullied!?"

"No, rather, it could be described as the opposite. For some unknown reason, Erica and I became the centers of popularity. Because of the kind of girl she is, Erica was able to adapt and react quite flexibly. On the other hand, I..."

Godou nodded deeply.

Erica was able to become the center of popularity wherever she went. In addition, a girl like Liliana, who was not only beautiful but also sternly dignified, would be popular because of being situated in "that kind of organization."

"No matter what I was doing I found myself surrounded heavily by those girls, without even a chance to eat my meals alone in peace. So troubling. Furthermore, Erica apparently found it quite interesting. She even said that she should take the opportunity to hold a salon gathering."

"From the way it looks, Kaoru-san also seems to be quite popular here."

Just as Godou echoed with his own observation, his cellphone vibrated from an incoming call.

Rather than Kaoru, it was Yuri who had called. Over the phone, she informed Godou that she expected to meet up with the two of them after she took Hikari home.



"Shizuka-san asked me to pass this along."

Godou received the takeout container of fried noodles from the Hime-Miko who had just arrived in one of the History Compilation Committee's cars. It was still warm.

"Just before I took Hikari to the car, Shizuka-san gave me this when I went to bid her goodbye."

"Come to think of it, she did mention she was going to treat us to fried noodles."

"She also had a message for you, Godou-san."

Yuri began to speak hesitantly with shyness for some unknown reason.

"Shizuka-san vigorously requested I pass to Godou-san this message urging you to get along well with me. I cannot help but feel embarrassed to hear something like that from a member of your family, Godou-san..."

The younger sister must have been displaying her usual angry expression when sarcastically requesting the message to be passed along.

But for better or worse, the sheltered high-class lady who had trouble understanding seemed to be accepting Shizuka's words with a positive interpretation.

Despite the embarrassment she felt, Yuri was displaying a blissful expression.

Shocked by the way she looked, Godou speechlessly lowered his gaze towards the noodles. No seaweed had been added to the noodles, presumably because Shizuka was being considerate for the girl accompanying her brother.

On the other hand, Liliana commented slightly sardonically.

"If Shizuka-san said this much, it looks like you and Mariya Yuri must have been having quite a delightful time together before I arrived."

"D-Don't say anything bizarre like quite delightful."

"I-Indeed. Godou-san and I were simply... Simply on a date, that is all—"

"Oh I see, a date huh."

"M-Mariya. Could you please pick a more prudent choice of words?"

"Eh? I am very sorry, did I say something strange just now?"

"No. Thank you for your valuable information, Mariya Yuri..."

Seeing Godou's frustration and Yuri's confusion, Liliana murmured:

"On further thought, this is completely not unexpected. Kusanagi Godou, in those kinds of situations, all it takes is a momentary opening for you to make a move. Your superb skills are truly astonishing. Swift, comprehensive, full of natural cunning—"

"Wait a minute, Liliana. What do you mean exactly by 'those kinds of situations'!?"

"Opportunities to further your intimacy in female relationships, of course."

Liliana declared as though she were a master detective who had solved a mystery.

Just as Godou was about to protest, Yuri interjected before he could speak.

"P-Please do not judge so hastily. Although I have no objections in regards to assessing Godou-san as that type of person, the issue cannot be gainsaid completely."

"H-Hey, I'm the one objecting here."

"Godou-san. Do you not remember that you were the one who declared to Shizuka-san just now that our relationship is completely free from guilt?"

Even though Yuri did not necessarily offer full support, Godou would surely suffer her derision if he did not concur with her.

Despite being routed on two separate fronts, Godou still replied the following:

"Yes, that's true but I think calling it a date—"

"Given the current circumstances, how about Liliana-san join us as well for a double date?"

" "Eh?" "

Godou and Liliana's voices coincided in perfect unison.

"W-Well, a date refers to both genders spending time together enjoyably—Is there anything wrong with this definition? In that case, if that is what we all desire, I think there is no problem. Am I wrong?"

"...Somehow it does not feel exactly right, but I cannot assert it is wrong either."

Liliana murmured with a troubled expression.

"However, it feels like it is not exactly unacceptable... Oh well, since that female fox Erica is not among us three, I suppose it is fine."

"Liliana-san, please watch your language."

"No, Mariya Yuri. Perhaps you may not know because your time spent dealing with her is still short. That woman frequently seizes opportunities to play devilish pranks. Thinking back now, it is possible that Erica was partially responsible for my rapid rise to popularity in the boarding school..."

Caught up in Yuri's pace, Liliana began to rant upon the subject.

On the other hand, Godou breathed a sigh of relief for the temporary respite.

Although he felt that many seeds had been sown for future problems to sprout, after some consideration, he decided to ignore them for now.

These issues stemmed from a mixture of Yuri's forthrightness and unfamiliarity with worldly matters, Liliana's hidden outrageous facet as someone who was knowledgeable yet lacking in common sense, as well as Kusanagi Godou's natural carelessness.

Upon hearing of this trio's conversation that had taken place, a certain person would ridicule "Isn't this a farce played by the three stooges!?" This occurred slightly afterwards.

"Given this opportunity, why don't we eat Shizuka's treat while we wait for Kaoru-san to arrive?"

At Godou's suggestion, the trio made their way to a park near the school.

On the way, they visited a convenience store and bought some oden[2] stew, Chinese buns and bottled tea etc.

"Because I have never had this type of food before, it feels a little exciting."

"Indeed, even though these dishes cannot be said to be particularly healthy."

Prompted by a comment from the classy young lady who apparently never bought junk food snacks on her way home from school, the female knight responded as she bought convenience store confectionery with a partially critical expression on her face.

The trio sat down on a bench in the park and began to have a simple dinner.

Godou was the first to comment on his sister's cooking.

"Hmm. Not particularly bad tasting but nothing outstanding either. Standard fried noodles sold at stalls."

"Not really, the flavor of the sauce is quite savory."

"Do remember that this is the fruit of Shizuka-san's well-intentioned efforts."

Godou's tactless criticism was met with Yuri and Liliana's reprimands.

That said, this was simply stall food at a temple fair that never aspired to reach the pinnacle of B-class delicacies. Besides, compared to taste, cost would have been the primary consideration when purchasing ingredients.

In actual fact, in terms of cooking skill, Shizuka's level was similar to her elder brother's—Based on these three points, Godou's comment was completely tactless indeed.

The Kusanagi siblings were raised by the laissez-faire mother and the grandfather who was frequently away from home.

Completely undaunted by the prospects of cooking in the kitchen, nevertheless, they could not be described as particularly great chefs. In this regard, the two siblings were identical.

After the meal, Godou received a text message from Kaoru.

"I am truly shocked and awed to have the king personally come out here to greet me, Godou-san."

Saying that, Sayanomiya Kaoru bowed her head solemnly.

This was the action she took the instant she spotted Godou after exiting the school gates.

However, compared to her excessively exaggerated words, the smile appearing on her lips was easygoing. Her head-bowing motion was also quite graceful. On the other hand, she usually displayed a slightly wry smile when performing this very Kaoru-style action.

Nevertheless, Godou could not help but ask:

"Kaoru-san... What is with this outfit?"

"Looks great, doesn't it? I had it specially made."

Kaoru's face displayed androgynous beauty as usual. Her body was also rather slender and exhibited her characteristic appearance that simultaneously resembled a beautiful girl and a handsome youth.

Like the sort of handsome youth who made appearances in traditional shoujo manga, her beautiful appearance seemed to be the stuff of dreams. Furthermore, Kaoru was dressed in gray uniform today. A male one.

"Isn't this an all-girls school? Doesn't this uniform(?) break school rules?"

"Fufufu. After all, I don't really like wearing sailor-style uniforms."

As if ignoring her gender recorded in the family registry, Kaoru declared:

"I simply prepared a uniform suitable for myself. Oh dear, it really took quite a lot of work for me to win over the teachers, the student council and the parent teacher association in order to be able to wear this outfit from day one."

She was probably referring to the clandestine tasks she undertook, making full use of her natural oratory and negotiation skills as well as her beauty and intellect.

While thinking it was such a waste for her to be squandering her rare talents on something like this, Godou summed up his critical reaction succinctly.

"Or from the very beginning, you could have selected a school that allowed students to wear casual clothing..."

"See, when a mountain stands in your way, it is only natural to want to climb over it. Besides, I quite enjoy ____ the uniforms here."

Her statement should probably be amended by filling the blank with the words "watching the girls who wear."

Godou secretly supplemented in his mind.

While they were conversing, girls passed by them one after another. They kept greeting Kaoru with bowed heads, using anachronistic greetings like "Good morrow, Kaoru-sama" or "Good greetings."

Everyone seemed to know Kaoru. Truly living up to the term "popular."

"By the way, since we have all arrived at the school gates, why did you send your request to me only by text message?"

That was why Godou had left Yuri and Liliana behind to receive Kaoru alone.

"If I was sighted together with girls like Yuri and Liliana, the girls in the school are going to get jealous. You're male, Godou-san, so it doesn't matter."

"...Normally, it should be the other way around."

Godou discovered he was apparently being used as a shield to handle her fans.

As Kaoru uttered taboo words incongruent with her identity as a female high school student at an all-girls school, Godou accompanied her back to the park.

Meeting up with Liliana and Yuri, they called a car from the History Compilation Committee. The next place they traveled to was a western mansion situated in Area 3 of the Chiyoda ward.

This was the Sayanomiya residence, the place where Committee members like Amakasu frequented.

Kaoru led Godou's entourage into the study.

"The sacred talisman with ties to the Illustrious Sage, True Lord Erlang... I never expected it would go as far as to attempt to harm you despite your identity as a Campione, Godou-san—My utmost apologies. Our predictions were apparently too naive."

"But anyway, why did it target me?"

Intrigued by the situation as she listened to Kaoru's apology, Yuri spoke up softly:

"Perhaps you were targeted precisely because you are Godou-san."

"Did you see something, Mariya? An oracle from spirit vision perhaps?"

"Oh no, nothing like that. It is a little difficult to explain at once..."

"...I see. I get it now."

Leaving Godou in clueless ignorance, even Liliana began to nod.

"If True Lord Erlang is a deity who vanquishes evil and upholds justice, then it is understandable why he would target Kusanagi Godou. After all, since he is the benevolent god who subdued the Great Sage Equaling Heaven, Sun Wukong, in the past, it stands even more to reason."

"You two truly amaze me. Come on and tell me what the reason is. I am completely clueless."

Despite Godou's request, the two girls seemed hesitant to speak.

As for Kaoru, she simply made a slightly wry smile as she cast an apologetic gaze at Yuri and Liliana.

After a brief moment, Yuri was the first to speak.

"Basically, since it is an evil-slaying artifact that can even weaken Marquis Voban's authority..."

"Kusanagi Godou, who has developed into a Devil King no way inferior to that elderly man, had also been judged as evil that must be vanquished."

Liliana's supplementary explanation made Godou realize with a shock.

"In other words, I have been judged as a person who repeatedly subjects the world to unspeakable acts of evil!?"

" "Apparently so." "

Yuri and Liliana expressed agreement simultaneously, causing Godou to bow his head in dejection.

On the other hand, Kaoru picked up a box made of paulownia wood from the desk in the study.

"Putting the reason for the incident aside for now, this is the talisman in question—Hmm?"

As soon as she spoke, a troubled expression surfaced on her dream-like face of a handsome youth.

She frantically opened the box, having apparently discovered something abnormal. Although not up to Yuri's level, Kaoru was still an outstanding user of spirit vision. Godou and the rest also gathered to peer into the box.

...It was empty. The paulownia box contained nothing inside.

"It was definitely still here yesterday, so when exactly did it..."

Just as Kaoru mused softly with a tone like a master detective showing interest in a mystery—

Godou shuddered once. Power suddenly surged through his entire body.

A "god" was nearby—Or rather, had already arrived?

Before Godou could locate the opponent's location, Yuri started to scream.

"Behind you—Behind Kaoru-san, Godou-san!"

Sayanomiya Kaoru was standing by the desk. Appearing behind her was the [Three Eyes] from earlier!



The young leader of the History Compilation Committee took action with great decisiveness.

Rather than turning to look back, she immediately ran in Godou's direction.

Since a being with the likes of a god or divine beast had manifested, there was no time for redundant actions. Only by taking cover behind the god-slayer as quickly as possible could one hope to find sanctuary.

Choosing this most appropriate measure without wasting a second, she swiftly put it into motion—

Indeed, her judgment was swift. However, it was still a step too late.

The [Three Eyes] floated up. The refined and dignified pair of eyes as well as the vertically oriented third eye. The pupils of the three eyes were infused with blue light simultaneously and glowed with brilliance.

Instantly, Kaoru's pupils also shone with blue light.

With a whoosh, Kaoru's slender body leaped gallantly, but not to hide behind Godou's back.

Instead, she sent a splendid spinning kick towards Godou's face. Profound mastery in martial arts were fully exhibited by her motions.

"Haa—!"

With a vigorous yelled, Kaoru unleashed a high kick with keen aim and speed.

Godou instantly bent down, almost losing balance and sitting on the floor.

Kaoru's leg swept through the spot at the height where his face had been. Had he failed to evade, the kick would have landed squarely and mercilessly. While confirming his judgment to be correct, Godou rolled over the carpet to distance himself from Kaoru.

Using the momentum from the roll, he immediately stood up.

Although the action was a little awkward, it did not matter. He had evaded the attack without injury and instantly renewed his posture.

"Please be careful! The will of True Lord Erlang inhabiting the Illustrious Sage's talisman has apparently taken control over Kaoru-san. It aims to vanquish you, Godou-san, who has been deemed evil!"

Probably receiving a spirit vision, Yuri gave a series of warnings.

From the way Kaoru looked, she definitely was not her usual self. Somehow gone were the dream-like beauty and libertine gaze that displayed curiosity towards everything. Flashing with blue light, her pupils were filled with stern fighting spirit, making her beautiful and courageous face even more striking in appearance!

Then the figure in the gray school uniform leaped again, intending to attack Godou once more.

"Please wake up, Sayanomiya Kaoru!"

Liliana swiftly inserted herself in between Godou and Kaoru.

Blue-eyed Kaoru extended her right hand as if intending to eliminate the interloper.

Raising her fist vertically, she sent a right hook towards the silver-haired girl's face. Godou watched with tongue-tied amazement. Like the kick just now, Kaoru was using Chinese martial arts.

Liliana blocked Kaoru's punch with her right arm.

She did not draw her beloved magic sword, probably to avoid harming Kaoru's body.

However, controlled by the "evil-slaying will," Kaoru nonchalantly swung her fist down on Liliana's arm.

The silver-haired female knight went "Ugh!?" in response, greatly alarmed and surprised.

However, she did not back down and was just about to grab and pick up Kaoru when—In the next instant, she was crouching on the ground.

This was the result of Kaoru's left index finger pressing on Liliana's chest.

"Guh. The technique known as pressure point attacking...!"

Crouched on the floor, Liliana groaned. Her body seemed immobilized by paralysis.

Attacking vitals and pressure points on the human body to subdue enemies effortlessly—

This was indeed a technique used by the Chinese demonic cult leader. The *Jiuweixue* pressure point was located on the chest. Godou had learned this piece of trivia from her direct disciple.

Next it was going to be his turn—

Just as Godou readied a stance, Kaoru went "Haa!" with another vigorous yell.

Then Yuri went "kyah" and collapsed, apparently losing strength in her lower body as a result of the yell. Furthermore, her legs extending out from beneath her uniform skirt were knocking together noisily as they trembled.

Apparently, Yuri no longer had the strength to stand.

Having neutralized a Hime-Miko with a vigorous shout, Kaoru turned towards Godou and approached.

Her strikingly beautiful face was like the midday sun.

Watching her expression which aptly conjured descriptions like "justice," "benevolence" or "hero," Godou muttered:

"...It wanted to avoid getting Mariya involved?"

Before Yuri could take any action like Liliana, a harmless method was used to neutralize her—

Was this a show of concern? The only "evil" that needed to be defeated was Kusanagi Godou alone. As if admitting to the doubts in Godou's mind, Kaoru's beautiful face smiled. Immediately, a bladed polearm appeared in her hand all of a sudden.

The double-edged trident—A great blade shaped into three prongs with sharp edges on the two lateral sides.

Rather than a Japanese weapon it was indeed a Chinese blade. Wielding the double-edged trident, Kaoru charged at Godou with great agility.

Erlang's mercy as the "benevolent one" could not possibly be extended towards Godou, probably.

Without any hesitation, Kaoru performed a downward diagonal slash.

Godou was not necessarily incapable of evading this double-edged trident.

The enemy before him was neither a great sinner who had caused the people suffering nor a user of monstrous strength beyond normal parameters. Given the opponent's level of martial technique, divine speed capable of handling the [Raptor] was very probable.

Under such circumstance, there was only one incarnation Godou could depend on.

The double-edged trident struck Godou's left shoulder. Slash—

The double-edged trident continued to tear through Godou's skin, muscles, collarbone, ribs etc, slashing its way towards his heart.

The only substance obstructing this attack was the bones of a Campione, possibly even tougher than the hardest metals on earth. Unimaginable heat and pain tore through Godou's body and mind.

Sacrificing his left shoulder to the slash wound, Godou was able to use the [Camel] incarnation in return.

He made it. The double-edged trident had yet to reach his heart.

Obtaining combat skills and leg strength that allowed him to fight war gods on equal footing in the past, Godou unleashed swift forward kicks against Kaoru repeatedly. This was a type of kicking strike akin to shoving the opponent away using the soles of the feet.

Kaoru and her slender body was sent flying by his kick.

That said, this simply kicked her away. No damage had been caused to Kaoru's body.

Having gradually mastered his authority, Godou was now capable of restraining the [Camel]'s destructive power to a certain extent. Hence, he was able to perform martial arts like that—

After kicking Kaoru away with a forward kick, Godou turned and performed a spinning kick instead of lowering his leg.

This was followed by a high kick upwards. However, he did not make a direct hit.

Brushing past Kaoru's temple with his foot, he gave her a concussive blow to the brain. His aim was to cause a concussion with minimum damage in order to neutralize Kaoru.

Pulling it off without a hitch, Godou rendered Kaoru unconscious and she collapsed as though turned off by a switch.

Kaoru unconscious. Liliana paralyzed. And Yuri with her legs gone limp.

The three girls were in a rather awkward state. But at least a crisis had been averted.

After Godou nodded towards Yuri and Liliana who were still conscious, the two girls displayed relieved expressions.

"True Lord Erlang's will... Seems to have left the room already."

"Looks like it. But why did it possess Sayanomiya Kaoru instead of Mariya Yuri or me who were by Kusanagi Godou's side? Did it choose the person who had used the evil-slaying sacred talisman?"

Yuri and Liliana's exchange prompted Godou to recall.

Amakasu's words. "There were two elite masters among those involved in the incident, so for the sake of saving lives, a risk was taken." One of them was Kaoru while the other was—

A troubling premonition surged in Godou's heart. Could it really be...?

"If my premonition is correct, the next person he will try to possess is Seishuuin?"

The other person, who along with Kaoru had attempted to use the talisman related to True Lord Erlang, was indeed Godou's companion who carried the title of the premier Hime-Miko.

Greatly shocked, Yuri immediately took out her cellphone.

"I-I am going to try to see if I can contact Ena-san!"

Since she was only drained of strength in her legs, moving her upper body should be fine.

Operating with stiff movements, she called up the contact list and pressed dial. However, she quickly hung her head.

"The call is not going through..."

Godou could not help but look at his right arm.

The divine sword residing there was also supposed to be akin to a "partner" to Seishuuin Ena. Furthermore, despite the sword's usually undisciplined attitude in normal situations, its personality was actually quite meddlesome whenever conflicts were encountered.

In spite of vast separation in physical distance, it maintained a spiritual bond with Ena—

"Hey... If Seishuuin were to encounter any mishap, tell this to her."

Godou knew that he should take care of the girls right here.

But instead, he exited the study.

Rushing rapidly by himself along the corridors in the Sayanomiya residence, he made his way to the garden.

"Call out my name if you encounter danger. Only by doing so will I be able to save you."

Just as Godou finally walked out the entryway and looked up to gaze at the dark starlit sky above Tokyo—

Godou heard a faint call transmitted from somewhere faraway. —Your Majesty, Ena has a bit of a bad feeling over here, please hurry over.

Instantly, gentle wind began to swirl beneath Godou's legs.

The gentle wind formed a vortex that gradually increased in strength, soon becoming a powerful cyclone.

When someone in a dangerous crisis called out Godou's name, it allowed him to fly to their location. This was Verethragna's first incarnation, the gust of [Wind].

This power currently activated to transport Kusanagi Godou to some unknown location.

—To be continued...

Translator's Notes and References

1. **Jump up↑ Illustrious Sage**(聖 賢): taken literally, 聖 means to manifest while 賢 means sage or saint when used as a title but also carries the meanings of divine, holy, sacred.
2. **Jump up↑ Oden**(おでん): a Japanese winter dish consisting of ingredients such as eggs, radish, konnyaku and fish cakes stewed in broth. Often sold from food carts and Japanese convenience stores during winter.^[1]

かびね!

—七つねの魔導士と神皇しの姫君—

VI



The Illustrious Sage, True Lord Erlang

Part 3

Guided by the vortex of [Wind], Godou was brought to an unknown land.

Godou nodded, acknowledging the result of the instantaneous teleportation performed using Verethragna's authority.

Finding himself on a riverside strewn with gravel, Godou was confronted by a mixed forest's autumn leaves of vivid red. Clearly this was in a mountain forest somewhere. Seishuuin Ena, who had "summoned" Godou here, was a girl who trained in the mountains as if it were her daily homework.

She was currently a few meters ahead.

Ena usually wore that uniform from some high school who knows where. However, this time she was dressed Japanese style with a white kimono top, a red, male-style hakama and a pair of wooden *geta* clogs.

This attire was rather fitting for a miko and someone training in the mountains.

Furthermore, she was wielding a wooden sword in a stance.

Her blade was pointed towards a certain direction—a familiar set of three eyes!

A pair of slender eyes hovering in midair with a third eye that opened vertically. Godou yelled out:

"Seishuuin! That thing is apparently the will of a god called Erlang whatever!"

"Erlang... Could it actually be the Illustrious Sage, True Lord Erlang? This thing was trying to take over Ena's body, almost succeeding in its surprise attack."

While explaining nonchalantly, Ena still kept her gaze and the wooden sword directed towards the enemy.

But judging from the tone of her voice, she clearly did not feel like she was in danger. This was because she knew very well that she was the one who had invoked Godou's [Wind] incarnation. As expected of the Hime-Miko of the Sword, her boldness was exceptional.

"Rather than an actual god, this thing would be better described as part of a god's will, left behind in the world... That's what it feels like. Because it doesn't seem to have a material body, Ena thinks that as long as one prevents it from possessing someone's body, there won't be much danger."

Godou nodded emphatically in response to Ena's words.

As the user of the mystic technique, divine possession, she was more experienced than anyone in the area of contact with gods. Together with the fact that she possessed instincts like a beast, Godou was convinced she must be right.

However, Godou and Ena immediately stared with their eyes wide open in surprise.

The sun had already set, giving rise to a starry sky above. Radiantly flashing blue spheres of light were now descending from the night sky.

These spheres of light floated down slowly like snowflakes.

The blue spheres of light landed on the three eyeballs. In the next instant, the three eyes transformed into the form of a tall young man—his handsome face bearing stern dignity and propriety. His attire was reminiscent of Beijing opera costumes, Chinese in style and rather colorful. It resembled the military leader costume the Great Sage Equaling Heaven had worn.

Furthermore, he still had three eyes as if it were the most natural thing in the world. The vertically-opening third eye was positioned on his forehead!

(Hereby stands the nephew of the Jade Emperor, the general commanding the forces of heaven and earth, bearing the name of Erlang the Illustrious Sage and True Lord. Kusanagi Godou, as the villainous Devil King, you are the target I seek to vanquish. Prepare yourself.)

The young man announced his name and smiled clearly and candidly.

This smile was filled with the sort of magnificence belonging to someone who was utterly convinced of his own righteousness.

On the other hand, the voice he used to announce his name was neither clear nor candid. Instead, it sounded like a

whisper.

This loudness should not be audible normally, but through suspicious divine powers, the voice was delivered to Godou and Ena's earshot.

"It turned into... a god?"

"This is something along the lines of a god's legacy will or regrets combining intimately with a body."

This sudden change greatly surprised Godou and Ena. However, there was no time to ponder the matter.

True Lord Erlang manifested a bladed weapon in his hand. The front part of the blade was shaped into three prongs—It's the double-edged trident!

"Watch out, Your Majesty!"

True Lord Erlang swung the double-edged trident to slash Godou.

Before the weapon could reach Godou, Ena stepped before him and blocked its path, intending to protect Godou. However, her weapon was merely an ordinary wooden sword—Godou immediately called out.

"Ama no Murakumo! Go and help Seishuuin!"

Alerted of the situation by Godou, Ena immediately threw away the wooden sword in her hand.

Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi suddenly manifested in her empty hands. Similar in structure to a Japanese sword, the divine sword had a mildly curving black blade. Swinging the sword she called her partner, Ena slashed at True Lord Erlang.

The respective blades of the god and the Hime-Miko clashed together.

Then they began exchanging blows, two or three at a time—Godou and Ena were dumbfounded once more.

Finding Ena's sword attack too difficult to evade normally, True Lord Erlang took a great leap backwards. Indeed, Ena was a master of the sword. Nevertheless, she should not be skilled enough to overwhelm a deity who was known as a warrior god of combat. Despite this being the case, why would he retreat...?

(—Hmph. Mobility is rather restricted since this is merely a crude body. I shall have to wait for some time. Once I grow accustomed to this body, I shall return for a rematch...)



The god whispered. Immediately after that, the three-eyed, handsome young man vanished like a puff of smoke.

"Oh? So that god appeared because of Ena and the rest? Sorry sorry."

"I have no intention of reprimanding you for that, but if you're going to apologize, a little more sincerity would be more appropriate."

After recounting the series of occurrences, Godou voiced his objections to Ena's airheaded apology.

According to Ena, this mountain was somewhere in a corner of Chichibu. She was training in the mountains as usual, using the deep mountain aura to cleanse and purify her body and mind.

"In that case, we'll just have to wait here for the strange god(?) to attack again. After all, he only came to this place for the purpose of targeting me. Plus deep in the mountains here, we won't be causing trouble to people and cities."

"Yes, understood. Let's do that."

Ena grinned and calmly expressed agreement.

In actual fact, Kusanagi Godou and Seishuui Ena were surprisingly similar people. Both possessed animal-like instincts and personalities that tended to take action before worrying, thus allowing them to act decisively during emergencies.

Given these two as a team, prolonged strategy planning would be the last thing one would expect.

"Then the last issue is where we should wait for that guy to appear. Although we could just stay here, it's really quite cold."

Just earlier, Godou was still in the city center of Tokyo.

But now, he was in the deep mountains of Chichibu where autumn was in full swing. The location was also at quite a high altitude. With only regular street clothes, whether the wind or the night air itself, both felt rather chilly.

"Well, let's take Your Majesty to a nice place. There's a mountain hut not too far from here."

Ena immediately suggested.

"I know the old man who uses the place when he comes here for gathering mountain vegetables and hunting. Ena also keeps stuff like rice and miso there for emergency situations. So we can make dinner there."

"Dinner eh? That's a really great idea."

Although Godou already had dinner earlier, it was not enough to fill his stomach completely. Furthermore, a meal to warm up his cold body would be most gratifying. Godou's eyes began to shine brightly.

Thus the two of them started walking along a mountain path.

Before setting off, Ena wrote a letter using notebook paper and an oil-based marker she had brought. After folding the paper four times and throwing it into the air, the letter suddenly vanished. This was mailing magic for sending letters faraway. In this case, the destination was the Sayanomiya residence.

This was for reporting Godou and Ena's situation to Kaoru, Yuri, Liliana and the rest because cellphones had no reception in a mountain like this. However, this spell could not be used unless the receiver's location was known, which meant that Godou and Ena had no way of obtaining a reply...

At any rate, Godou and Ena fulfilled their minimum obligation to keep in touch.

Godou followed Ena along the mountain path which took them upstream of the river. Sometimes they had to push vegetation aside and other times they had to follow animal trails.

Naturally, there were no street lights or anything of that sort while they traveled at night like this.

When they walked in areas with a clear view of the sky, the moon and the stars offered illumination. The stars in the night canopy of the sky proved to be an unexpected bright source of light.

However, there was no such blessing when moving amidst dense foliage.

During these times, it felt like wandering in darkness with something sticky entangling one's body and Godou's only beacon was the view of Ena's back ahead of him. Even an experienced hiker would probably have difficulty advancing in these conditions.

On the other hand, Kusanagi Godou was a Campione.

In actual fact, given the "special constitution" of a godslayer, Godou possessed rather powerful night vision.

Well, it was still impossible for him to see clearly in complete darkness. But given "this level of darkness," there was no problem at all. Like a nocturnal beast, Godou followed closely behind Ena.

Speaking of which, there seemed to be someone who had called Campiones like Godou and others "god-slaying beasts"—

"Well, good night vision doesn't necessarily translate into hiking prowess..."

Godou muttered as he followed behind Ena.

Because she was the child of nature who treated mountain training as part of her everyday life, Ena walked rather quickly despite hiking at night. And to think she was also carrying a case containing her luggage—the "secret box" as it was known in the world of mountain training.

Godou had to summon his best effort to keep up or else he would soon be left behind.

That said, although his steps were not as quick and nimble, he did not pant or become out of breath. For someone who had always taken pride in his stamina, at least he succeeded in preserving his self-esteem. On the other hand, it was quite likely that Ena had intentionally controlled her pace to accommodate an "amateur" like him...

After walking a fair distance, they came to the side of a river again.

This place appeared to be upstream of their previous location. Godou suddenly had an idea.

"If we're going to make dinner, it'd be nice to catch some fish from this river."

"Yeah, but you won't have much luck fishing here. So it's best not to try."

"Really? The water looks so clear here, so I thought lots of fish would inhabit it."

Ena's nonchalant answer puzzled Godou.

The Hime-Miko of the Sword walking in front turned her head around, a grin displayed on her lips.

"There is a rapid current slightly downstream from here leading to a waterfall. The current is so fast that even fish find it difficult to swim in, which is why fish are rare in this area."

"Wow, this is really deep in the mountains."

The water flowing by should really be called the headwater or upper course rather than a river.

Feeling impressed, Godou nodded.

Although he was an athletic proponent of outdoor activities with plenty of camping and hiking experience, he had seldom stepped foot so deeply into the mountains. Without Ena as his guide, he would most probably run into trouble quickly.

At the same time, he was quite surprised by the [Wind]'s ability to transport him instantaneously this deep into the mountains.

But then again, this was the incarnation capable of transcending boundaries between reality and the Netherworld. Godou felt that so long as conditions were satisfied, he could even fly across to the other side of the globe.

Walking along this river, Godou and Ena soon arrived before a mountain hut.

It was a crude wooden dwelling built not too far from the river.

Were it in a city, an old and decrepit building like this would have been knocked down long ago. Not only was the entire house covered by a thin layer of dirt, it was also making creaking noises.

At least it still had a roof and despite the thin wooden boards used, it did have walls.

Given the current situation, it could be considered three-star accommodations. Following Ena who behaved as if she were returning to her own home, Godou entered with gratitude.

On their first encounter, Ena had brewed the same type of powdered tea she was serving now.

Last time, Ena's casual yet experienced looking manner of preparation resulted in very tasty tea. Currently, Ena was lighting up a fire on the hearth which was already smoked black from use.

A pot of water was freshly boiled over it.

"Although this isn't anything special and it's just crude tea literally... Please enjoy, Your Majesty."

Just as Godou expected, the crude tea Ena prepared casually turned out to be really tasty.

Despite the poorly preserved tea leaves in the hut and the use of an ordinary teapot one could find anywhere, the rich flavor made all these adverse conditions seem like a lie.

However, Godou went "Eh?" in puzzlement after drinking the tea.

Fishing rice grains out of a sack, Ena tossed them into the boiling water in the same manner as she had prepared the tea. She was quite casual about it. Rather than standing in testament to her free and unfettered personality, this simply gave Godou an impression of appropriate casualness.

"Let me warn beforehand. Do not expect too much from the taste of Ena's cooking."

"But I find your tea tasty as always, Seishuun."

"Well, see, the art of tea has been part of a general's knowledge ever since ancient times."

This daughter, hailing from a family that gave rise to generals in the Warring States Period, explained in a pretentiously knowing manner.

Her original personality aside, Ena had received an excellent Yamato Nadeshiko education as a descendant from the House of Seishuun. Could it be possible that cooking was one area she did not excel in?

Intrigued, Godou brought up another subject.

"That three-eyed guy... Do you think he can be considered a god?"

After the brief conflict just now, this was the question that had occupied Godou's mind as he hiked.

The handsome young man transformed from the three eyes—

Whether facing the set of eyes or the handsome young man, Godou's body and mind had filled with power for battle. This could be taken as proof of a god. However, the enemy's avoidance of a battle with Ena seemed a little contrary to the ways of [Heretic Gods]...

"Yes. It should be considered a god, probably. A god originating from the talisman of the Illustrious Sage, there is no mistake that he is the hero, True Lord Erlang, who defeated Sun Wukong."

Although delivered with a casual tone of voice, Ena still concurred with Godou's idea.

"Then some sort of circumstance is preventing him from going all out, but I've no idea what."

"You think so too, Seishuun? Well, I don't think pondering about it any further would yield anything useful. Since Mariya isn't here, let's just put the matter aside for now."

No matter what sort of origins the enemy had, ultimately Godou still had to meet him in battle.

Deciding that, Godou and Ena nodded to each other.

For this pair whose instinctual and beast-like skills surpassed their intellect, agreement was easily reached in situations like this one.

If Erica was present, she would probably mock him sardonically, going 'Despite insisting your adherence to reason all the time, you always end up acting the same way, Godou...'

"If you feel concerned, why don't we try asking Grampsy?"

Ena suddenly suggested.

"The talisman of the Illustrious Sage... This thing came from Grampsy and company in the Netherworld. Some kind of divine talisman prepared somewhere and taken for the purpose of sealing the dragon and snake vanquishing hero, Sun Wukong."

"Susanoo and those guys huh... Well, forget about it then."

The ancient ones who acted as the History Compilation Committee's "council of elders." The one acting as chief was Susanoo—recalling the storm god who lived secluded in the Netherworld, Godou immediately responded.

"That guy's not gonna give us an honest answer."

"Yeah, Ena thinks so too, actually."

Ena nodded as if pleased with their agreement. She smiled for some reason.

"What's up, Seishuuin? You look so happy."

"Fufu. Because Your Majesty tends to share the same opinion as me most of the time, it's quite easy to imagine what you're thinking. Other than Your Majesty, there are very few... No, there's no one else who has a mind that thinks like Ena."

"W-Why do I feel like I'm nowhere near as ridiculous as you, Seishuuin..."

"What are you talking about? Your Majesty is roughly a hundred times more ridiculous than Ena."

Whether as a miko or a Yamato Nadeshiko, Seishuuin Ena was a girl beyond the realm of normal.

Godou could not help but protest against such a comment coming from someone like her. That said, after scrutinizing his own behavior, Godou could only swallow the words he was almost about to spit out—

Could she have guessed what he was thinking? As if encouraging Godou, Ena patted him on the shoulder.

"Cheer up. It's alright. No matter how ridiculous a person you are, Your Majesty, we will always stay by your side. No need to mind Ena and the rest of us, just continue to charge forward!"

"On the other hand, I wish you girls could restrain me before I charge forward..."

"Then it won't be very interesting. Besides, no one can stop Your Majesty when you're charging forward."

After commenting on Godou's personality with full confidence, Ena changed the subject.

"By the way... Your Majesty has already decided to fight, right?"

"Well yeah. That Erlang whatever guy seems to have his sights set on me. And if he really is a [Heretic God], then I need to take him down before he raises a commotion. That's really the way it should be done."

"Then, umm... *That* is necessary after all, right?"

Godou stared blankly all of a sudden. What was *that* referring to? Hence Ena whispered softly:

"The sword for slicing apart True Lord Erlang. It's a simple matter for you to obtain knowledge about what kind of god he is. All you need to do is ask, Your Majesty, and Ena will prepare immediately."

"Ehhh!?"

Asked by her so suddenly, Godou was rendered speechless. Then he also noticed.

Ena had started at some point to look up to him shyly as if observing his face for his intentions.

"B-Back in Nikkou when fighting side by side, Your Majesty has already recognized Ena as your woman, right?"

"R-R-R-Recognition is a bit premature to say. Besides, I'd curse and scold myself if I lived so irresponsibly as a despicable human being!"

"In any case, Ena is known publically as Your Majesty's woman. So it's fine..."

"Fine—!?"

"No matter how many times Your Majesty wishes to kiss... It's fine. Yes, Ena wants to kiss Your Majesty."

Hey hey. Isn't this behavior for instilling knowledge required for battling gods rather than for the sake of kissing?

Godou wanted to say this but could not bring himself to do so. As he thought, this was because mouth-to-mouth action was too shocking for him.

"Back then was when everyone was together... But Ena really wants to have a good and proper kiss with Your Majesty alone..."

Ena's lips trembled as she whispered softly. She was quite nervous.

The girl, unaccustomed to this behavior, was mustering her courage to 'plead' with him. In order to fight the god again, the trump card, the [Spell Words of the Sword], must be prepared beforehand after all.

These thoughts swirled into a vortex in Godou's mind as dozens of seconds passed. A brief moment of hesitation. But after overcoming these doubts, Godou finally made his decision.

Reaching out with his hand, he embraced Ena's body that was slender yet suitably voluptuous in all the right places.

"I'm relying on you. Please tell me about the god, True Lord Erlang."

"Ah..."

Godou used his lips to seal Ena's mouth just as she was about to whisper, stealing her lips.

Smooch. With the coming together of mucous membranes, the harmonious sounds roused Godou's inner passion to a blaze.

He separated from Ena's lips for an instant. The usually carefree girl displayed a sad expression, reluctant to part. Her eyes seemed to be pleading as she gazed at Godou, she did not speak.

She was feeling shy. This was an expression and attitude Godou could not imagine coming from the way Ena usually acted.

Finding her adorable, Godou once again drew near her lips.

Ena's face instantly brightened up. Pressing their lips together, they began to kiss again.

Godou sucked on the Ena's lips as she displayed a blissful expression, enjoying a fulfilling feeling of satisfaction.

"Your Majesty, let's have another go... Okay?"

Seductive words came from Ena's lips.

As Ena panted heavily, Godou kissed her even more forcefully, sucking on her lips.

On the other hand, Ena remained passive as if betraying her own request. All she did was yield and accommodate Godou.

She was completely different from Erica in this regard and unaccustomed to this behavior. She probably had little idea of what to do in this situation. Finding Ena inexorably adorable like this, Godou inserted his tongue into Ena's mouth and probed deep.

"Mmm... Ah!"

Surprised, Ena moaned. But unfazed, Godou began to explore her tongue inside Ena's mouth.

The two tongues entangled each other and came together intimately as one. Wetting each other's lips with their saliva, they gazed into each other's eyes.

After a long and thorough kiss, Godou moved his lips away again.

Ena's face was blushing red from ecstasy as she nodded at Godou, indicating it was about time to perform the "ritual." Godou covered her mouth with his lips to substitute for an answer.

"Th-The Illustrious Sage, True Lord Erlang is an ancient Chinese god. He is also known for his monster-slaying ability..."

Their lips pressed together, Ena seemed especially adorable as she murmured softly, accompanied by weak breaths.

"His prototype was once thought to be a general from the either the Qin or Sui dynasties. A man with great accomplishments in regulating floods. However, like the Great Sage Equaling Heaven, he ended up amalgamating historical facts with all sorts of folk stories to produce the current form of True Lord Erlang's legend..."



Their lips pressed together, spell words passed from one to the other, building a magical connection between the two of them.

Knowledge about True Lord Erlang the Illustrious Sage flowed into Godou's mind, the result of the spell words Ena had composed. Kissing repeatedly in this manner, the two transferred knowledge.

Not long after, Godou nodded greatly.

Knowledge about an enemy god was the requirement for using Verethragna's tenth incarnation, the [Warrior].

Once this knowledge was obtained, everything was ready. Godou confirmed that he was able to use this weapon. Filled with gratitude, Godou finally kissed Ena gently on the lips.

"Fufu. Ena is so happy to be able to help Your Majesty..."

After smiling adorably, Ena suddenly jumped in surprise.

She frantically separated herself from Godou's body. While engaged in their behavior, they had embraced each other, driven by their heightened emotions. Ena seemed to be suddenly embarrassed by her actions.

Avoiding Godou's gaze, Ena bowed her head, looking very shy. This sort of behavior made her usual boldness seem like a far fetched lie. Seeing her act so adorably, Godou decided he would feel bad if he extended her embarrassment any further. Hence he decided not to strike up conversation for now.

The pair remained silent for a brief while.

However, the silence was not awkward. Instead, there was a feeling as if their hearts were connected and they could communicate without words.

Godou spontaneously looked up and found his gaze meeting with Ena's. Feeling a little embarrassed, he peeked at Ena. Likewise, Ena peeked at Godou and they both smiled shyly at the same time.

Regaining their composure after a while, Ena looked at the pot on the hearth and said:

"Oh, looks like it's about done."

Thin porridge had been cooking over a slow fire during this time. Ena took out two little containers carrying salt and miso respectively.

Worrying about this Hime-Miko who was unskilled in cooking, Godou offered to help:

"If you don't mind, how about you let me do the rest?"

"It's okay, I want to test out the secret recipe I learned from an older man I'm acquainted with."

"Secret recipe? Sounds quite amazing."

"It's quite simple really. I remember him saying it when he was boiling something in a pot. No need to put too much stuff, just add enough miso to make the taste palatable. That's what he said roughly."

Using her usual unrefined manner, Ena scattered salt and miso into the thin porridge. After giving it a taste, she went "That's about right" and declared her task complete.

Pouring the thin porridge into their teacups, Godou and Ena began to eat.

In terms of results, it was quite a satisfying meal.

As the taste of miso spread throughout Godou's hungry stomach which had emptied as a result of physical exertion, the hot porridge warmed up his cold body.

However, the best seasoning was actually the opportunity to partake in this outdoor cooking with a kindred spirit like Ena here.



Several hours passed after the weapon was prepared and dinner was eaten—

Completely ready, Godou suddenly shuddered. Power coursed through his body and his emotions began to rise. These were battle preparations.

A Campione's body and mind would automatically enter battle readiness whenever a god approached.

As he gestured to Ena with his eyes, the Hime-Miko of the Sword nodded.

The two stood up and went outside the hut.

The approaching enemy should be the handsome god—the Illustrious Sage, True Lord Erlang.

"I knew it huh..."

Just as expected, a handsome young man was standing outside the hut, dressed glamorously. As Godou nodded at the sight, Ena instantly stepped forward from his side. She intended to participate in the battle.

"Your Majesty, Ama no Murakumo please."

Godou slowly opened his right palm and granted her the divine sword's usage rights.

This now allowed Ena to summoned the "partner" at any time. However, in contrast to the girl who readied herself for battle, True Lord Erlang spoke, using his whispering voice as usual.

(O child of mankind, untainted by evil, I have no intention of harming an innocent girl. Only evil monsters are my targets for slaying.)

It sounded like a voice carried by wind from afar.

Under normal conditions, they should be hearing a candid and manly voice, right?

Such was the impression given by True Lord Erlang(?)'s voice.

(Would you please stand down as a show of respect to the Illustrious Sage, True Lord Erlang...?)

"Impossible. As His Majesty's woman, Ena is responsible for managing his sword—this partner. I will protect His Majesty even at the cost of my life."

The jet-black divine sword suddenly manifested in Ena's hand as she made her bold declaration. The Hime-Miko's entire body proceeded to be filled with Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi's divine aura.

Using this technique of divine possession, Ena obtained combat power allowing her to fight divine beasts, existences one step below gods.

True Lord Erlang smiled tenderly in response.

(Excellent resolve. Disregarding your foolishness of serving the wrong master, my name of Yang Erlang shall be tainted if I should fail to commend you for your loyalty. In that case, I swear I shall defeat Kusanagi Godou without bringing you to any harm!)

He really acted so much like an "ally of justice" that one could almost see a halo behind him.

It was quite fitting for a god known for benevolence and evil slaying. Nevertheless, Godou was quite surprised. He recalled the [Heretic God], Verethragna, he had met in the very beginning.

Thinking back closely, that youth was also a protector god of justice.

However, wandering on earth, he was devoured by the maniacal nature of his heretic self, twisting his original divinity subtly, going as far as to make him a menace to the inhabitants of Sardinia.

In contrast, True Lord Erlang the Illustrious Sage displayed such dazzling splendor—

Incomprehensible. Godou cast his doubts aside for now. He currently had to fight this three-eyed god.

"The Illustrious Sage, True Lord Erlang, was born as the nephew of the emperor of the heavens, the highest god in the Daoist pantheon!"

Godou spoke spell words softly, taking on the [Warrior] incarnation.

In order to create the blade for slicing apart this benevolent god, he continued to utter spell words.

"In ancient times, the sister of the emperor of the heavens descended upon the earth and bore a child with a human. This child is True Lord Erlang. As a soldier, indeed he served his uncle in the celestial realm."

Spheres of light appeared one after another in Godou's surroundings.

"However, the majority of his stories take place in the mortal realm, including the subduing of Sun Wukong. Despite being a god, True Lord Erlang made his residence in China's *Guanzhou* prefecture. After receiving divine orders to defeat Sun Wukong who was causing mayhem in the lower realm, he stepped forward to subdue the monkey."

Within the blink of an eye, the spheres of light now numbered in the hundreds.

Like radiant stars in a galaxy, shining in the night sky, these were all blades for slicing True Lord Erlang apart and weapons that moved in accordance with Godou's thoughts.

Readying his deadly sword formation, Godou glared at his enemy sharply.

"A noble heavenly being who lingered in the mortal realm to fight and perform benevolent deeds. In other words, a legend of a wandering noble. Rather than a pure god of war, he was a archetypical protagonist from legends of wandering nobles—this is precisely True Lord Erlang's characteristic and the reason why the people revere and praise him!"

Responding to these spell words that carried the intent to attack, dozens of spheres of light flew towards True Lord Erlang.

On the other hand, the three-eyed, handsome young man smiled cheerfully despite being the target. He was quite composed.

(Hmph. To be honest, I already understand your sword quite well.)

These words, delivered with a smile, greatly surprised Godou.

(Indeed, the spell words for slicing through us gods is a troublesome weapon. But so long as one knows its operating principles, one could easily come up with quite a number of counters.)

"Counters!?"

As Godou watched in surprise, True Lord Erlang underwent a transformation.

The three-eyed handsome young man instantly took on the form of a monkey. Standing 160cm in height, wearing a yellow Beijing opera costume, wielding the Ruyi Staff—this appearance belonged precisely to the Great Sage Equaling Heaven, Sun Wukong!

(Behold, I am not the divine lord, the Illustrious Sage. My family name is Sun, given name is Wukong... The Great Sage Equaling Heaven hereby announces his entry!)

The flying spell words of the sword all struck Sun Wukong/True Lord Erlang.

However, these spheres of light, which were normally supposed to slice through his divinity, only ended up bumping into Sun Wukong's body of flesh. They were unable to cause any damage at all!

"This is a spell of transformation, Your Majesty. Like Sun Wukong, True Lord Erlang is also a god skilled in transformation!"

"Using [Transformation] to become another god, thereby obtaining a body unaffected by the [Sword]!?"

The spell words for slicing True Lord Erlang could not cut the Great Sage Equaling Heaven.

Through Ena's warning and the [Warrior]'s eyes that could see through an enemy's traits, Godou discerned what his enemy had done.

Furthermore, he discovered another fact.

Apart from the [Warrior], none of Verethragna's incarnations were available.

Let alone the [Bull] or the [Raptor], even the trump card that was in certain ways more precious than the [Warrior]—the [White Stallion]—could not be used.

Godou frowned.

[Heretic Gods] and Campiones were existences reviled by the world for the most part.

Consequently, the [White Stallion] incarnation was able to take a decisive role in most of Godou's battles by exterminating the people's public enemy. However, in True Lord Erlang's case—

He had shown consideration by refraining from harming Liliana, Yuri, Ena and the others.

In other words, True Lord Erlang's actions embodied his existence as a "perfect god of benevolence" who "only vanquished evil." Hence, he could not possibly become the [White Stallion]'s target.

"None of my usual tactics work at all... So I guess the 'nemesis' Mariya mentioned is this guy huh."

Finding the enemy more difficult to handle than expected, Godou muttered.

But involuntarily, his lips twisted in a savage grin, forming a grotesque shape.

Fine by me. Even if I cannot use the spell words of the sword or the power of the sun, I'll still continue to fight. No matter what, I will seize victory in my hands. After all, that's exactly what I've been doing all along.

Fighting hopeless battles against enemies with no chance of winning—

Kusanagi Godou found himself gradually accustomed to this sort of challenging situation despite his best intentions!

(Fufufufu. What sharp eyes you have. As a Devil King who stands as the enemy of gods, this is more like it.)

True Lord Erlang whispered as if responding to Godou's fighting spirit.

Then Sun Wukong's body began to change. From a war god in the shape of a monkey, he instantly turned into a tall and muscular old man.

This was a person—no, god whom Godou recognized.

"Grampsy!?"

Ena cried out. After taking on Sun Wukong's appearance, True Lord Erlang transformed into Susanoo this time.

—To be continued...



七夜姫!

—まわるもくろみと初見しの魔計—

VII

The Illustrious Sage, True Lord Erlang

Part 4

Kusanagi Godou and the Illustrious Sage, True Lord Erlang, began their battle in front of a riverside hut.

This was a confrontation between the god-slaying sword wielded by the war god Verethragna against the transformation arts employed by the noble, evil-slaying god of China.

"Manifest justice in this world through these spell words of mine!"

Chanting the sacred warlord's incantation, Godou accelerated a portion of the [Sword].

Over a thousand spheres of light, shining brightly like stars in the night sky, surrounded Godou all around and overhead.

From among them, ten-odd spheres of light flew towards True Lord Erlang.

The three-eyed, handsome young man was supposed to be attacked by these spheres of light, but his current appearance was that of a muscular old man.

The enemy had taken the form of the hermit [Heretic God], Susanoo, with whom Godou was acquainted.

(Fufu. This skill is employed for the sake of countering your spell words of the sword. Savor it well.)

The flying [Swords] struck Susanoo/True Lord Erlang's body.

But Godou frowned. They simply struck without causing any damage.

The [Sword] turned out to be completely useless!

(These spell words are the blades for slicing True Lord Erlang the Illustrious Sage... In that case, were I to transform into another god, I should be able to withstand them more or less. It looks like my idea is correct.)

"Looks like it, but then again, there should be limits to transformations, right?"

He had transformed into completely unrelated divinities.

No matter how skilled in the spell of transformation, he could not possibly keep this up indefinitely. Godou began to focus his gaze and stared at the being who looked just like the old god Susanoo.

The [Warrior] incarnation, which controlled the sword of spell words, possessed the power to see through an enemy's true nature.

Currently, True Lord Erlang could be described as weaving Susanoo's divinity using the spell of transformation to cover himself like a layer of clothing.

In this manner, Verethragna's [Sword] could apparently be deceived for now—

Godou then discovered something. He could see a tiny crack in this layer of clothing where True Lord Erlang's original divinity was leaking out.

So long as it could be seen like this—the enemy can be vanquished!

"I am the strongest, holding all victory in my hands! All evil-doers, tremble before my strength."

Chanting spell words with certainty, Godou caused roughly ten spheres of light to accelerate. Then the spheres flew before Susanoo/True Lord Erlang one after another, and just before they penetrated that muscular body—

(Make haste! To manifest endless divine powers, a miracle shall appear!)

Susanoo's lips moved to release True Lord Erlang's whispers. The enemy was chanting spell words as well.

The storm god's appearance changed at this time, taking on a new form in seconds.

"Another guy I know!"

Godou yelled.

This time, True Lord Erlang had become a glaring old man dressed in a black coat.

An air of intellect combined with a pair of emerald-green eyes like a tiger's—the enemy from the past, Dejanstahl Voban.

Furthermore, the instant True Lord Erlang took on the guise of Devil King "Voban"—

Godou could no longer see the crack. After True Lord Erlang's original divinity was concealed beneath the newly transformed appearance, the crack was no longer visible.

As Godou watched in great surprise, the [Swords] struck Voban's body.

Once again, they struck their target without any effect. Apparently because Godou could no longer see the crack, the [Sword] was unable to slice True Lord Erlang's divinity inside.

This countermeasure stonewalled the [Sword]'s spell words...!

Godou glared sharply in defiance to the enemy's little trick. In response, a refreshing smile appeared on Voban's face. A rather dissonant sight. Indeed, the elderly man could not possibly smile so cheerfully.

This stood as evidence that True Lord Erlang was actually inside.

Since that was the case, Godou focused his eyes and stared again, in order to find a similar imperfection in the transformation spell.

However, before he could succeed, True Lord Erlang took action.

(Make haste!)

Accompanied by brief spell words, he transformed again.

This time, he did not take on the appearance of a Campione but a deity instead.

Godou jumped in surprise. It was a nostalgic silver-haired pubescent girl. Although she was wearing modern clothing, she gave off a conqueror's aura like a queen. This was the serpent goddess of darkness whom Godou had fought in the past.

True Lord Erlang transformed into Heretic Athena, and at the same time—

(Light that reveals evil, manifest thus. Enact miracles to vanquish evil and uphold justice, burn the heretics and weaken all evil!)

A vertical opening appeared on young Athena's forehead to reveal a third eye. This eye suddenly shone brightly.

Instantly, Godou felt magical power flowing out of his body.

"Guh—!"

The third eye seemed to manifest the miracle of stealing a Campione's power.

Godou recalled what happened during dusk.

When facing off against True Lord Erlang for the first time, he was also drained of magical power in the same way.

Seeing as that was the case, Godou instantly raised the magical power in his body in order to resist the miracle enacted by the [Eye]. A Campione's body already possessed extremely potent resistance against magic and authorities. So long as Godou was not caught off guard, he could prevent his magical power from being completely drained. Nevertheless, he still clicked his tongue.

Godou could still feel the magical power in his body siphoned off slowly.

As expected of his "nemesis." Godou could not defend completely. Accompanying the loss of magical power, the [Sword]'s shining spheres of light disappeared one by one from Godou's surroundings.

Then the enemy's counterattack came.

(Fufufu, now is about time for me to begin taking the offensive.)

Three-eyed Athena murmured as she approached.

With lightning speed, Athena/True Lord Erlang jumped in front of Godou. A three-pronged bladed polearm manifested in the goddess' right hand.

This was True Lord Erlang's double-edged trident—using this weapon, the enemy made a thrust towards Godou's heart!

A sure-kill thrust was arriving with frightening speed.

Just in the nick of time, Godou jumped left and managed to evade the attack.

Campiones were blessed with exceptional concentration during combat. Thanks to that, Godou was able scurry around with beast-like reflexes.

"It feels like this guy should be able to fight equally with that idiot Doni..."

Faced with his opponent's overwhelming offensive, Godou groaned.

Salvatore Doni was a genius swordsman for whom titles such as Sword Demon or Sword God would not be excessive. At the same time, he was also a Campione. Godou recognized that True Lord Erlang's martial prowess were on the same level as that man.

Attempting to use the [Raptor] incarnation's divine speed to fight—would be a poor decision indeed.

Masters on this level should be able to see through divine speed, rendering it meaningless.

(Since I have grown accustomed to this body, my movements will not be as clumsy as earlier. Come, fight me fair and square!)

"If you want to fight fair and square, then I hope you'd stop using those absurd transformations!"

True Lord Erlang smiled and ignored Godou's retort, transforming once again.

This time he turned into Athena's adolescent form, instantly growing taller and lengthening the arms and legs. The clothes also changed into modest, ancient attire—the original appearance Athena had recovered.

Seeing this, Godou attempted to search for a flaw in the transformation again.

But just as he was about to do that, True Lord Erlang suddenly threw away the double-edged trident in his hand. At the same time, the ambush took place.

Ena slashed towards True Lord Erlang who was in Athena's form.

In order to avoid getting in the way of Godou's manipulation of the [Sword], the Hime-Miko of the Sword had kept her distance from the battlefield, lying in wait for a chance to make a surprise attack with the jet-black divine blade, Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi.

"Yaaaaaaaaaaaah!"

Ena swung the divine sword overhead using the *hassou-no-kamae* stance.^[1] This was a strike using the body's full power.

Most likely eschewing all defense, this was a deadly blow focused entirely on taking out the enemy. Furthermore, Ena was already in the state of divine possession, having summoned Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi's divine aura into her body.

Nevertheless, Athena/True Lord Erlang calmly evaded the slash with a light twist of the body.

Not only that, he even swung his right hand like a whip in a flash during the instant Ena moved past him. Effortlessly, he pushed the Hime-Miko away with the back of his hand.

(O maiden, such ferocious vigor you have!)

"Guh—!"

"Are you okay, Seishuuiin!?"

Seeing his companion sent flying by the god's blow and fallen on the ground, Godou called out.

Ena swiftly got up before she answered and prepared the divine sword in a stance once more. Her quick movements and imposing demeanor indicated that she was not injured.

"No harm done at all, Your Majesty. Completely okay."

Ena reported her safety completely nonchalantly.

"Didn't the god, True Lord Erlang, mention just now? He will obtain victory without harming Ena whatsoever. So there shouldn't be any danger."

"We can't possibly believe that guy completely. He could easily go back on a verbal agreement."

"True. But then again, Ena feels like this god won't go back on his word. How should one put it? Basically he absolutely won't do anything immoral like that..."

Ena disagreed with Godou's warning.

Godou was mildly surprised, although he did secretly harbor the same impression Ena got from the god.

Even if the fundamental nature of the divinity was benevolent, wandering on earth as a heretic caused distortions at the

same time, finally resulting in a god of misfortune bringing calamity and disaster. This was what [Heretic Gods] were supposed to be.

(Ho. There is no need to be concerned with trivial details of that sort.)

Keeping the third eye open, Athena/True Lord Erlang smiled.

(Your considerations are correct. I, Erlang, am not one of those who shamelessly renege on their own promises. How about I swear an oath not to harm you the slightest?)

Immediately after declaring thus, True Lord Erlang manifested a new weapon in his hand.

First there was the bow in his left hand. Then there was the fist-sized ball of iron in his right. The evil-slaying and righteous warrior god placed the iron ball onto the bowstring and drew the bow to its limit.

The iron ball was shot like an arrow—This was the ancient Chinese long range weapon known as the peddle bow.

Twang! As the bowstring sounded, the iron ball flew out. The target was Kusanagi Godou, naturally. Furthermore, the iron ball released crackling blue-white lightning as it flew!

Just as Godou and Ena readied their stances to receive the incoming attack—

"Eli Eli lama sabachthani? Oh Lord, why hast thou forsaken me!?"

Godou and Ena both heard familiar spell words.

"O my God, I cry in the day time, but thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent—" [2]

These were the Golgotha spell words, the trump card of the girl known as the [Diavolo Rosso].

Just as expected, Erica leaped from the shadows amidst the trees, wrapped in her usual red and black cape, carrying the lion's magic sword, Cuore di Leone.

"But thou art holy, O thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel!" [3]

The magic sword was currently infused with the spell words of resentment and despair.

An ordinary human would probably die instantly upon close contact with the sword. Using Cuore di Leone which had been imbued with this power, Erica struck down the electrified iron ball head on.

Lightning scattered noisily as the two halves of the iron ball rolled about on the ground.

The latecomer turned her head back to reveal a cheerful smile, her face as glamorous as always.

"I seem to have kept you two waiting, Godou and Ena-san."

"You don't seem very flustered, on the other hand."

Godou calmly replied to the "partner" who had finally arrived.

Although this battle was playing out completely differently from past conflicts, Godou found himself surprisingly calm and composed—

Simply the fact of Erica's arrival gave him such a feeling.

"Because I have appointments with other people sometimes. It's hard to be in both places at once. But no matter, it's not like one could bring a million reinforcements."

Erica asserted fearlessly, reminiscent of a lioness.

"Just as you already know, I, Erica Blandelli alone, am more valuable than a million reinforcements. Godou, I shall prove my worth and compensate my tardy arrival at the same time!"

Even though she was already late, Erica easily took the spotlight as the protagonist in the scene.

This manner of entering the stage made full use of Erica's natural talents.

In response to Erica's appearance, the warrior god transformed from Athena back to his original form.

This was True Lord Erlang the Illustrious Sage's reappearance as the tall and handsome young man as well as the three-eyed warrior.

(Kusanagi Godou's direct vassals have gathered. In that case, I have no choice but to show my true appearance once more.)

"Gathered?"

"Yes. I cannot possibly let Erica steal ahead and take all the credit!"

Answering in a stern tone, this was Liliana's voice which Godou had not heard for the last few hours.

Wielding the bow of Jonathan in her hand, she walked to Godou's side.

Godou went "I see" and nodded. The girls must have rushed over from Tokyo to Chichibu after receiving the letter Godou and Ena had sent several hours earlier.

After arriving near this mountain, they used magic to search for Godou's location, then flew here using Liliana's flight magic—

If that was how things transpired, it would only be natural for another girl to be present. Just as expected, Yuri also came running, dressed in her miko outfit.

"Godou-san, I have important news regarding True Lord Erlang..."

Yuri reported as soon as she arrived by Godou's side.

"About the noble one... The real identity of the True Lord!"

Godou was shocked by her words. He immediately swept his gaze towards the rest of his companions. Erica, Liliana and Ena all nodded in response, implying they will hold the god off for a while.

"Yaaaaaaaah!"

Ena rushed headlong with Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi, charging at True Lord Erlang. She unleashed a blazing slash.

The True Lord swiftly evaded the attack. Aiming at this opportunity, Erica used Cuore di Leone to make a thrusting attack. Thrice in a row.

Although True Lord Erlang evaded the three thrusts successively, he was thrown off balance slightly.

Erica instantly leaped to the right, creating an opening for Liliana to fire her arrows.

The arrows of blue-white light shot by the bow of Jonathan were also infused with the spell words of David!

(Fufufufu. These maidens are quite a handful to handle!)

With extreme alacrity, True Lord Erlang swung his right hand, striking down the arrow of light with a karate chop.

Indeed, these were literally divine skills that only a warrior god could possess.

Next, Ena used Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi again to perform an overhead cut. It was a jumping slash that used the entire body's strength.

True Lord Erlang caught the divine sword with both hands in a display of the secret arts of unarmed counters against bladed weaponry.

Ena, Erica and Liliana carried out their own attacks in continuous succession.

Meanwhile, True Lord Erlang exhibited all sorts of divine skills, evading, deflecting and blocking the trio's attacks completely.

However, Erica and the girls were not so pressed as to be driven back, due to the fact that the True Lord only engaged in defense. Thus, the girls succeeded in buying time for Godou.

During this time, Godou listened to what Yuri had to say.

"You saw what kind of god he is?"

"Yes. The True Lord Erlang manifesting here is not a [Heretic God]. Instead, he could be said to be... A [True God]."

Hearing Yuri's oracle, Godou was rendered dumbfounded. A true god? Did that refer to a particular god?

"Godou-san, you already know that the Netherworld is the place known as the Boundary of Life and Immortality. The Domain of Life refers to the mortal world here. The Domain of Immortality is the world where gods originally reside."

Yuri explained the structure of the world in a quick tone of voice.

"[Heretic Gods] do not exist in the Domain of Immortality. When gods arrive in the mortal world by some chance occurrence, they are twisted and become [Heretic Gods] who deviate from their original existence. The god manifesting

here is the True Lord Erlang who only exists in the Domain of Immortality... So this should be an clone."

"You said clone? A clone of the actual Erlang?"

"Yes. It feels like the True Lord is transmitting his divine power from the Domain of Immortality, thereby taking action with this clone. That is the feeling I am getting."

"Come to think of it, that guy did mention something about a 'crude body.'"

Godou did not think Yuri's speculation was off. He nodded.

I see. So that was why he made a perfect display of how a evil-slaying warrior god of benevolence should act.

"In that case, then the [White Stallion] definitely could not target him."

The unfortunate gut feeling he was having was now confirmed. Godou sighed. To be honest, he was banking his hope on the [White Stallion] a little.

Godou had wondered if the handsome god would expose his nature as a [Heretic God] sooner or later.

In that case, the battle against him became even simpler.

"So Godou-san's 'nemesis' that I sensed last time, really turns out to be..."

"Looks like it's this guy. And indeed he's tough to handle, most truly."

"Umm, Godou-san? Despite saying that, your face looks rather calm."

"Hmm, yeah. It's basically thanks to you, Mariya, I am now able to steel my resolve."

Godou smiled wryly in response to the incredulous Hime-Miko's query.

"Or rather, you've helped me muster my determination to test out a drastic measure I wanted to avoid as much as possible. Otherwise, I really wouldn't have wanted to do this."

"But even if I tried, I cannot stop you, right?"

This time it was Yuri's turn to sigh while Godou scratched his head.

"Since it has come to this, I can only say this to you: Please take care...!"

"Yeah. I will try my best to return alive. So that's that!"

Yuri's words were analogous to a virtuous wife bidding farewell to a terrible husband who was setting off for a reckless duel.

Feeling gratitude for the gentleness in Yuri's gaze, Godou rushed towards the god and the rest of his companions.

This was in front of the hut where he and Ena had stayed, the riverside where he had passed by when hiking earlier in the night.

The trio of Erica, Ena and Liliana currently had True Lord Erlang surrounded.

Ultimately, they were able to persevere till now only because the enemy did nothing but defend.

While evading the girls' magic sword, divine sword and arrows of light, the True Lord finally attacked.

First he shouted "Hah!" to immobilize Liliana. Then he poked Ena in the back with his middle finger, sending the Hime-Miko of the Sword collapsing on her knees.

Finally, he swung his arm like a whip and struck Erica with the back of his hand.

Although the blonde beauty already used Cuore di Leone to block, she still could not withstand the impact and was sent flying faraway.

Godou's arrival coincided with where she was flying, so he immediately caught her.

"Are you okay, Erica?"

"Yes, I guess. What about you, are you ready?"

Held in his arms, Erica did not have any injuries. Indeed, the enemy was truly a warrior god of benevolence. True Lord Erlang's earlier oath applied to people apart from Ena and he intended to adhere to it to the very end.

"Yes. I will decide the match next so there's something I need your help for."

True Lord Erlang displayed a light smile as he stared straight at Godou.

His companions could no longer pin him down so Godou explained concisely.

"What I'm about to do will be quite risky so I'm relying on you. If it succeeds, my life will be saved, so do your best."

"What completely vague orders. But you can thank me, Erica Blandelli, right now."

The smile surfacing on Erica's face displayed a lioness' ferocity and a queen's glory.

"I will show you that I am the woman who will surely meet your expectations!"

"Yeah, I'm relying on you."

Ending the brief planning session, Godou sprinted towards True Lord Erlang.

Now it was time to decide the match one on one. True Lord Erlang smiled at the arrival of the final phase.

(Fufu. You have already discovered my true nature.)

"This is only your clone. Your real self must be hidden somewhere, right?"

(Hiding myself is truly regrettable. A true god has no way of traveling to the mortal world. Or rather, the instant one leaves, one becomes heretical...)

True Lord Erlang's clone murmured in the same sort of incredible whispers he used previously.

This voice was likely transmitted all the way from the Domain of Immortality.

(Having taken an interest in you who has involved yourself with an old acquaintance of mine, I was thinking of testing you a little. Coincidentally, those miko happened to be randomly messing with my talisman.)

"Give me a break. If that's the case, could you not involve anyone apart from me!?"

Saying that, Godou turned his attention to the sky.

There were still a few dozen [Swords] hovering high above.

"Go!"

A brief spell word caused all the [Swords] to begin moving all at once.

They were aimed at True Lord Erlang, naturally. One after another, the spheres of light struck their target. However, it was still ineffective because the True Lord had taken on Athena's appearance again.

While withstanding the attacks of the [Sword]'s spell words, True Lord Erlang smiled using Athena's face.

(Kusanagi Godou. You cannot defeat me in this manner...)

"Of course I know that. So... please, Seishuun!"

Godou made his request to the kneeling Hime-Miko. Ena instantly understood his intentions.

"Yes. Ama no Murakumo, return to His Majesty!"

The jet-black divine sword disappeared from Ena and manifested in Godou's hand instead.

The self-styled "partner" of the god-slayer, the god in the form of a sword. Godou gripped the Japanese sword's hilt tightly as he glared at Athena/True Lord Erlang.

Finally free of the [Sword]'s wave of attacks, the benevolent warrior god drew his peddle bow and fired!

The iron ball was shot. Judging from its trajectory, it was aimed at Kusanagi Godou's forehead. The iron ball sliced through wind as it traveled but Godou evaded calmly.

Just as the iron ball was about to strike Godou on the forehead, he used the [Raptor] incarnation.

This was the incarnation that could only be used in response to a high speed attack. While using this incarnation of divine speed, Godou obtained a light and agile body as well as overwhelming acceleration while everything else slowed down—

The iron ball slicing through the wind slowed down all at once, allowing Godou to dodge with ease.

However, the use of this incarnation caused severe heart pain to Godou afterwards and also immobilized his body not long after that.

(Fufu. Do you really believe you can defeat me in the limited time you have remaining?)

Seeing a time limit in Godou's course of action, True Lord Erlang smiled.

At the same time, he transformed from Athena back to the original handsome young man. He must have concluded that there was no need to transform once Godou no longer had the [Sword].

Just as he pointed out, there was little time remaining.

Hence, Godou had to decide the match in one fell swoop.

Wielding Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi arbitrarily, Godou pointed the blade at True Lord Erlang and made a straight thrust. Using the [Raptor]'s divine speed, he attacked in a straight line!

(Hmph, no matter what kind of divine speed, fast as lightning, I can still see through it!)

Boldly asserting, True Lord Erlang swung his right fist in response.

A martial arts move capable of countering divine speed. This was a secret art that both Salvatore Doni and Her Eminence Luo Hao had exhibited in the past. Nevertheless, because of Erlang's "crude body" as Godou expected—

True Lord Erlang's fist failed to strike down Godou. Instead, it resulted in mutual injuries.

Godou pierced the flank of True Lord Erlang's abdomen using Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi.

True Lord Erlang's hook punch landed on Godou's left ribs.

"Guha!"

Suffering the horrifying attack, Godou felt intense pain.

It felt like being struck by lightning. Although the punch landed in the region of his ribs, the terrifying impact coursed through his entire body. But at least he survived.

On the other hand, Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi was embedded deeply in True Lord Erlang's flank. Although the divine sword was buried to the hilt, there was not a single drop of bleeding.

(Hmm... This is getting challenging.)

True Lord Erlang's calm and composed whispers could be heard. As expected, this was not his true body.

Godou grinned savagely in response. Now he could put "that plan" into action...

Forcing his aching body to move, Godou kicked the ground and jumped.

(Hmm—!?)

Taking the skewered True Lord Erlang along with him, Godou took a leap.

The [Raptor] incarnation granted more than simply mobility of divine speed. Jumping ability and lightness of the body were also greatly augmented. Owing to this ability, Godou jumped into the river with divine speed.

The surface water current was quite rapid, with uneven rocks protruding. Since this was quite far up the mountain near the river's source, the water was not very deep, only reaching up to roughly knee or waist level at most.

Landing on a rock in the middle of the river, Godou jumped again.

Following the river, Godou aimed for some place higher, farther away.

(What are you planning, Kusanagi Godou!?)

Thanks to the giant leaps granted by the [Raptor], Godou obtained an overhead view of the headwater's flow. About thirty meters away from the hut where Godou and Ena had rested, there was a fast flowing waterfall.

Although the river was quite narrow at that point and lacked the magnificence of a great waterfall, the height of the fall was quite substantial. Probably a fall of forty or fifty meters roughly.

This was the type of waterfall that fishes could hardly swim through. Godou nodded for it was exactly as Ena described.

'There is a rapid current slightly downstream from here leading to a waterfall. The current is so fast that even fish find it difficult to swim in, which is why fish are rare in this area.'

Making his jumps as high and far as he could, Godou finally reached the air above the waterfall—

At last, Godou used his trump card, the one he really wanted to avoid using.

"For victory, hasten forth before me..."

As the leap reached its peak, Godou chanted spell words as freefall began.

From the air, Godou could hear the rumbling of the waterfall beneath.

"O immortal sun, I beseech thee to grant radiance to the stallion. O stallion that moveth godlike with wondrous grace, bringest forth the halo of thy master—!"

Only targeting great sinners who had brought suffering to the people, this was the [White Stallion] incarnation.

And this time, the target was—Kusanagi Godou himself.

(Fuhahahaha! You wish to defeat me even at the cost of sacrificing yourself?)

Despite the time being night, the rays of dawn appeared in the eastern sky.

Bathed in the rosy glow together with Godou, True Lord Erlang, currently skewered by Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi, was unbelievably laughing with delight.

(T-To think you had the self-awareness of the great sinner you are!)

"S-Screw that! That's why I didn't want to use this method!"

(But then again, this means mutually assured destruction together with me?)

True Lord Erlang spoke as he motioned towards the faraway bottom of the waterfall they were freefalling towards.

He's not planning to resist? That's quite honest of him. In this very instant, a chain carrying an anchor came flying from the ground and wrapped itself multiple times around Godou's right foot.

True Lord Erlang whispered (Hmm!?) and stared dumbfounded. Godou breathed a sigh of relief.

"That girl Erica managed it after all..."

The instant he murmured, the chain clattered as it began to tug Godou's body.

This chain was created from Erica's iron alchemy. Launched into the air from the ground, it began to drag Godou.

Then the sun's shining light came flying from the eastern sky. Godou began to meditate silently: Reduce the scale of destruction as much as possible. Reduce, reduce... He kept reciting in his mind.

If the [White Stallion] was used without restraint, the tragic incineration of Palermo's harbor would be repeated.

But if he reduced the power as much as possible, he could limit destruction to roughly the size of two or three yachts. As for the greatest scale of destruction, Godou had no idea but the thought of testing it out never occurred to him...

Due to reducing the power halfway, the size of the shining beam of light shrunk all at once.

One resulting advantage was that the flames rushing through the sky missed the original target whose position had deviated—Kusanagi Godou who was being dragged by the chain.

In this manner, only True Lord Erlang was engulfed by the light and heat.

(Fufufu. What a fulfilling night, Kusanagi Godou. Should ill fate bring our paths to cross again, a rematch with no holds barred would be nice. Let us meet again!)

Godou barely managed to hear the handsome warrior god's parting words.

Perhaps he exhausted his good fortune in the scene just now. After saving Godou from his crisis, the chain loosened and lost grip of him. Godou fell straight down towards the waterfall beneath. Or rather than fall, he was crashing down.

The only saving grace was that the waterfall directly beneath would break his fall. Several seconds later, Godou crashed and sank into the water while experiencing a terrifying impact.

Furthermore, his heart was suffering maximum pain and his body was getting stiff with paralysis. These were all side effects after using the [Raptor].

Am I going to die this time? Godou was struck with the fear of death. Oh well, ever since becoming a Campione, he had already endured such terrifying experiences repeatedly, numbering in the teens.

One could say that terrifying experiences were customary now.

Even so—Godou began to ponder with deep feeling. He really wished for occasional opponents he could defeat easily

with the [Ten Incarnations]. Facing opponents of that sort, he would not need to bear so much hardship every single time...

As he prayed for this wish from the bottom of his heart, Godou faced death once again.

"Are you okay, Kusanagi Godou!?"

Then someone extended a helping hand.

The god-slayer was saved by the selfless efforts of a friend, naturally, rather than a goddess of salvation.

Jumping swiftly into the waterfall, Liliana pulled Godou out from the water. Naturally, the silver-haired knight with flight capability would act the fastest in situations like this one.

Supported by Liliana on the bank at the bottom of the waterfall, Godou managed to sit up.

Very soon, he would enter the state of complete immobilization which would definitely result in drowning. Despite his embarrassing state, Godou desperately tried to speak.

"A-At least I survived... Thank you for saving me. But..."

Due to swallowing many mouthfuls of river water as well as the usual paralysis, Godou could not speak very well.

Nevertheless, he still forced himself to express gratitude to Liliana. He added:

"I-It's common for people trying to save the drowning to get into accidents themselves... Be more careful..."

"No need to worry. Do remember that I am a witch, so I more or less know several spells for preventing drowning. Witches are not only able to fly in the sky but also skilled in swimming in the water."

Influenced by Liliana's giggling smile, Godou smiled in return. Come to think of it, a mermaid swimming freely in the water would be quite an elegant sight.

Realizing he was saved as a result of this, Godou nodded gratefully to Liliana—Then he noticed something at this moment and frantically turned his gaze away.

To his great surprise, Liliana was dressed only in underwear. Her slender figure was clad only in a two-piece set of violet lingerie.

"M-My apologies. I was thinking it would be easier to save you in this manner, so I swiftly undressed before entering the water..."

"I-Idiot... I should be the one saying sorry about this. You shouldn't need to apologize."

Liliana used her arms to cover up her chest in embarrassment.

「も、申し訳ありませんっ。
あなたを救助しやすいようにと思って、
水に入る前、とっさに脱いで
しまいました……」

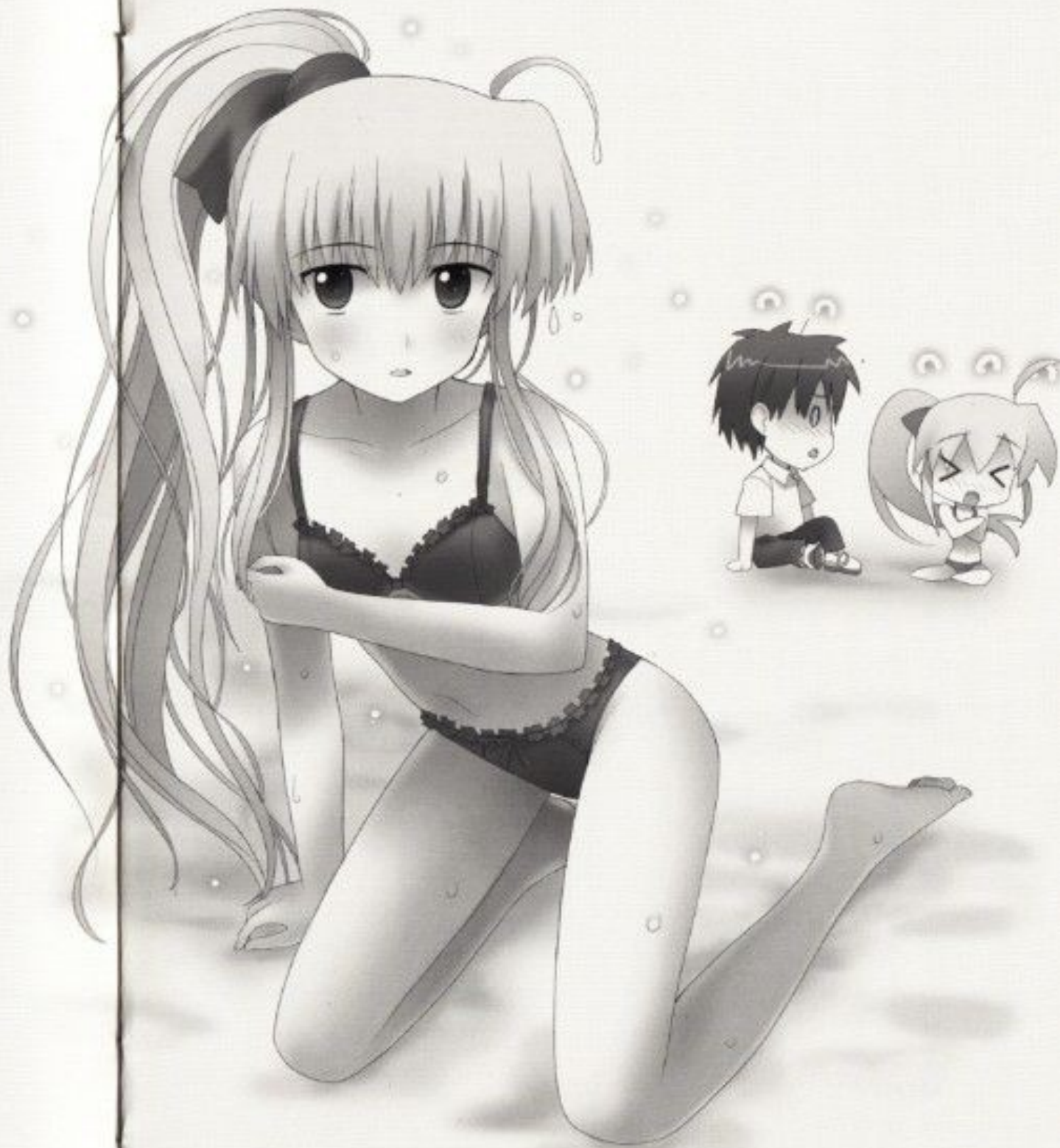
リリアナは恥ずかしがって、

両腕でうすい胸を隠していた。

銀髪的女騎士は箱杯に身をすくませて、

護堂の目をやりす。そして……としていたのだが……。





On the other hand, Godou's body had started to become rigid, preventing him from shifting his line of sight.

Consequently, the silver-haired knight desperately shrank into a ball, trying to avert his gaze.

But then she suddenly jumped in surprise and leaned close to Godou's face instead.

"U-Umm. I have a suggestion..."

Clearly it was just a simple question, but her voice sounded inexplicably seductive.

Her usual, stern demeanor was gone as if it never existed. Godou gulped in response.

"Kusanagi Godou. Your body seems to be in poor condition. I believe that healing magic needs to be administered."

"Eh...!?"

"Th-This is simply an act of healing. So you must accept it no matter what!"

"B-But even if you say that so suddenly..."

As much as Godou wanted to stop her, Liliana slowly pressed her lips close.

She intended to apply magic through mouth to mouth. As much as Godou wished to evade, his body could not move. Furthermore, he found himself attracted to Liliana's beautiful face and the moist-looking eyes gazing at him-

Just as he was about to accept the silver-haired knight's request—

"Wait a minute, Lily. Since everyone is here, you can't be stealing credit for yourself, right?"

"S-Stealing credit is something that never crossed my mind. I am simply worried about the state of my lord's health."

Erica expressed her objections with ladylike elegance. Although slightly panicking, Liliana still retorted in a stern and knightly tone of voice. At some point in time, everyone had arrived to this downstream location.

Erica, Ena had arrived. Even Yuri, who had contributed greatly, was approaching as she panted heavily.

"Besides, I believe that Seishu Ena is the first person to steal a march."

Glancing at Ena's carefree face, Liliana stated.

"Kusanagi Godou must have obtained knowledge about True Lord Erlang at some point in time. The one who took on the role of instruction could be no one else but you."

"Yes. So that doesn't count as stealing a march."

Ena happily ignored the female knight's accusations.

"If someone else apart from Ena were present, then Ena wouldn't need to do it."

"However..."

"E-Excuse me, everyone. Let us first put this matter aside for now. Do remember that Godou-san fell from such a great height and was even drowning, okay!?"

Yuri interjected with a slightly angry tone of voice.

"Our first priority is to take care of Godou-san before—"

"You have a point, but there's really no need to be too concerned with priority at times like these, right?"

Erica smiled calmly in response.

"This person—Kusanagi Godou—is quite absurd in all sorts of ways, but above all is his ridiculous aspect of being 'unkillable.' "

"That does sound about right, but Erica-san!"

Godou was greatly pleased by Yuri's care towards him in furiously trying to convince the rest of the girls.

Oh well, as part of the common sense faction, Yuri would only accidentally say something like 'that does sound about right' because she was caught up in the mood of the situation.

In any case, Godou felt extremely cold in his completely drenched state, unable to move his arms at all.

Whether the dispute between the four girls, fights against strange gods, or even near death experiences like this, all of it could be considered a frequent occurrence in his life. Nothing particularly shocking.

Godou took a deep breath, feeling inexplicably happy about the girls' argument.

Meanwhile, in a corner of the Netherworld—

Two noble ones were standing face to face in a deep mountain hut while a storm raged outside. One was the elderly god known as Susanoo, the former [Heretic God] Haya Susanoo no Mikoto.

He was the storm god with intimate ties to Japanese imperial authority as well as the proper owner of Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi.

"So, True Lord, what's your take on the brat?"

"A reckless and immature fellow. However, combined with the unruly willpower he displayed in the end, it is certainly fitting for a god-slayer. Speaking of which—"

The one answering Susanoo's question was the handsome warrior god, the Illustrious Sage, True Lord Erlang.

"The heavenly child who slumbers... To me it is difficult to determine if he is truly capable of defeating the god-slaying Devil Kings."

True Lord Erlang possessed the countenance of the [Noble Wandering Hero]. This was also an aspect belonging to the heroic god nicknamed the "King of the End."

"Are you filled with anticipation for something you sensed?"

"Hahaha. I believe that unruly fellow's exploits should not stop with battling the Great Sage Equaling Heaven. Should an opportunity arise in the future, I will exterminate him for good."

True Lord Erlang laughed lightly and told Susanoo:

"In that case, I cannot idle here any longer."

"Hoho. My apologies for troubling you in various ways."

Almost simultaneously, True Lord Erlang disappeared from the thatched hut.

The real True Lord Erlang could only exist in the [Domain of Immortality].

This time, only a small portion of his divine spirit had descended upon the earth due to being summoned by the talisman of the Illustrious Sage.

Furthermore, this Netherworld was the homeward path leading to the Domain of Immortality.

Along the way back, True Lord Erlang had a chat with Susanoo at the latter's invitation.

Watching the True Lord vanish, Susanoo smiled with joy and refilled his wine cup.

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Translation Notes and References

1. [Jump up↑](#) **Hassou-no-kamae**(横 手 前): one of the five stances of kendo, an offensive posture with the sword pointing upright and the blade sloping slightly to the rear.[1]
2. [Jump up↑](#) Psalm 22:2
3. [Jump up↑](#) Psalm 22:3

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